



RESPONDING TO CRISES: ARE CURRENT POLICIES AND PRACTICES THE ANSWER?

Julian Harston

Doubt is widely expressed whether the United Nations can cope with the large increase in peace-keeping demands that have been made on it in recent years. Experience shows there is every reason to believe that it can. But assuring that it does will require both administrative reforms and a new commitment of resources and purpose from member countries, including some of those now expressing doubts.

Dans bien des milieux, on met en doute l'aptitude des Nations Unies à répondre aux demandes, de plus en plus nombreuses ces dernières années, d'interventions pour le maintien de la paix. Or, l'expérience montre qu'on a toute raison de croire l'ONU à la hauteur de cette tâche. Pour cela, cependant, il lui faudra non seulement se réformer sur le plan administratif, mais aussi compter sur un plus ferme appui et de plus vastes ressources de la part des pays membres, y compris de certains d'entre eux qui expriment aujourd'hui des doutes à son égard.

Before dissecting the capabilities of the UN, I'd like to start by calling attention to Canada's extraordinary contribution to the UN in general and to peacekeeping in particular. In 1948, Canada began its proud tradition of participation in UN peacekeeping missions, starting with UNTSO (the UN Truce Supervision Operation) in the Middle East in 1948 and continuing through at least 30 other missions. I recall that when I worked with Kofi Annan at UNPROFOR (the UN Protection Force) HQ in Zagreb, whenever there was a problem, his first response was always: "Let's ask the Canadians."

As a UN peacekeeping official I will concentrate on the role of the UN—one of the main players—in responding to international crises. I come to this issue with some level of experience. I was the head of the UNPROFOR political unit during its last ill-fated days, followed by a year in Belgrade dealing with the Yugoslavs: a challenging, frustrating, and always interesting experience. I then served as representative of the Secretary-General and chief of the fourth peacekeeping mission in Haiti. Now I find myself back in the Balkans as Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General.

The founders of the United Nations could not have envisaged the number and the complexity of the conflicts and crises we now face. In its first 40 years, the UN deployed 13 peacekeeping operations. Since 1988, more than 40 mis-

sions have been launched. Peacekeepers were usually sent to cope with conflict between states. Today, peacekeeping forces are more often deployed to deal with civil conflict, in which one or more of the parties are warlords.

Some commentators have claimed that the UN is unable to perform any tasks beyond "old" peacekeeping. The UN has demonstrated that it can do the job, and do it well, when it is given the right mandate, resources, organizational structure and political support. There is no reason the UN should always be less well equipped than regional organizations to undertake these tasks. In addition, there is no guarantee that there will always be a suitable and willing regional organization to carry them out.

At the start of this new century, the United Nations must be equipped—managerially, structurally and politically—to meet both short and long-term demands. International emergencies will demand that we continue to respond through humanitarian assistance and peacekeeping operations.

Humanitarian assistance is essential, but it does not address the root causes of crises. Similarly, peacekeeping, despite its intrinsic value, is often a holding action—an attempt to give warring sides breathing room in which to settle their differences. It is crucial that we focus more intensively on longer-term peace-building. Recent experience in Haiti shows just how difficult this is—a case of no money and

little co-operation from a country lacking politicians with any real sense of responsibility. Another question for another day is: what are we to do about failed states?

Let me begin with humanitarian assistance. It is essential that humanitarian assistance be delivered in accordance with certain principles. First, it is intended for those “in need,” that is, those who are unable to obtain for themselves the basic essentials of life—food, clean water, shelter and medical care—because of either natural calamity or man-made disaster. It is not intended to feed military personnel, unless they are being demobilized, and it is not intended to enrich the ruling or commercial classes.

Second, humanitarian assistance must be delivered in a strictly impartial way. Organizations must not select their beneficiaries on the basis of ethnic origin, religious persuasion, or political affiliation. Children, of course, may be given priority, and programs should recognize the particular needs of women in disaster situations.

Third, if governments are unable to provide for the humanitarian needs of the victims of disasters, they are under strong moral obligation to allow humanitarian organizations to do so. In fact, gaining access to victims is a major challenge in day-to-day fieldwork, and in recent conflicts has become part of the strategy of the warring parties. If the UN and other international players cannot reach the victims, we are fundamentally impaired in doing our work. It is important and tragic to note that since January 1994, 177 UN civilian staff members have been killed in the field and some 240 have been taken hostage or kidnapped in places where the blue flag failed to protect them. Only three culprits were brought to justice by their national governments for the murders of UN staffers.

Interaction between the political and humanitarian spheres must improve. Since the start of the last decade, major humanitarian operations have been mounted in the midst of armed conflict in different areas around the world, but the political and humanitarian agendas are often at odds.

The impact of the global media on humanitarian assistance is another complicating factor. Sensational coverage of major humanitarian crises certainly helps to secure funding for much-needed assistance, but it also distracts attention from already “forgotten” emergencies and creates competition between immediate and long-term assistance.

In the euphoric aftermath of the US-led and UN-sanctioned Gulf War in 1990 there were unrealistic expectations of the capacity of the UN to prevent, manage and resolve international conflict. Many commentators on international affairs said that the UN was belatedly fulfilling the dreams of its founders. The UN was given military jobs that it was ill equipped to carry out in places like Angola, Rwanda, Somalia and Bosnia.

The UN’s 50th anniversary turned into a wake rather than a celebration. The performance of the UN in field operations doomed former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. The widespread conclusion was that the UN was incapable of conducting peacekeeping operations. When former Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Bernard Miyet was appointed, he was told by a number of people that he had secured an international sinecure, as the organization would never again be actively engaged in peacekeeping.

Those difficult missions were flawed in conception and inadequate in execution. In the words of the Brahimi report on UN Peace Operations (available at http://www.un.org/peace/reports/peace_operations/):

It should have come as no surprise to anyone that some of the missions of the past decade would be particularly hard to accomplish: they tended to deploy where conflict had not resulted in victory for any side, where a military stalemate or international pressure or both had brought fighting to a halt but at least some of the parties to the conflict were not seriously committed to ending the confrontation. United Nations operations thus did not deploy into post-conflict situations but tried to create them.

Those who had been eager to give the United Nations expanded responsibilities, including key members of the Security Council, were now among the loudest critics of the organization. They did not avoid the politics of blame, but neither did they own up to their fair share of responsibility for the UN’s failures. In addition, many Western politicians and the international media seemed unable to recall the other UN successes of recent years—in Mozambique, Namibia and, to a degree, Cambodia.

The price of failure was a crisis of confidence within the Security Council and a significant decline in commitment to United Nations peacekeeping. In July 1995, 67,269 troops were deployed in UN missions as compared with only 24,657 troops in July 1996.

In response to the reduction in peacekeeping

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and in light of the financial crisis afflicting the organization, the UN encouraged other institutions, mainly regional organizations, to take a more active role in the maintenance of international peace and security. This policy was also based on the logic that regional peacekeeping operations might be more effective because they have a greater stake in resolving conflicts close to home and a greater sensitivity to the needs of warring factions. Moreover, it reflected the realization that the United Nations has no monopoly on peacekeeping.

It didn't take much for the United Nations to persuade regional organizations to conduct peacekeeping operations. In fact, some had been the most vociferous critics of UN peacekeeping and were keen to embrace a greater operational role for themselves.

However, the general record of regional peacekeeping has proved to be as mixed as that of the United Nations. The ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Monitoring Group, ECOMOG (Economic Community Monitoring Group), was deployed in Liberia with a mandate to gain a cease-fire, to protect civilians, and restore law and order. The force was not able to impose a cease-fire. A UN peacekeeping mission, UNOMIL (UN Observer Mission in Liberia), was established and worked to implement the ECOWAS-brokered peace agreement leading to the successful joint monitoring of the 1997 elections, which ended Liberia's terrible civil war.

In Georgia, another UN operation, UNOMIG (UN Observer Mission in Georgia), works closely with OSCE (the Organisation for Security Cooperation in Europe) and the peacekeeping force of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Dayton Agreement authorized NATO to deploy a combat-ready force of more than 60,000 heavily armed troops to supervise an established cease-fire and to separate the former warring parties. IFOR and its leaner successor SFOR (the NATO Stabilization Force) have been successful in creating a secure environment and stabilizing the military situation. Regional peacekeeping has dramatized the varying political, financial and technical capabilities of regional organizations.

After a few years of unpopularity, international peacekeeping is again in fashion. New missions have been established in Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, and Ethiopia and Eritrea. In some ways, this is at least a tacit recognition of

the value of UN peacekeeping. Nevertheless, the UN has become a more cautious bride. Brahimi even comes close to suggesting that in certain circumstances the Secretary-General can, and should, say no.

As the United Nations begins another era of broad engagement in peacekeeping, it may be asked: Have we learned the lessons of the recent past? Can the United Nations do better in the future? Or is the UN being sent into new operations that are doomed to failure?

Some of my answers, which I submitted to the Brahimi panel on UN Peace Operations, are reflected in the panel's report:

Certain axiomatic pre-requisites for successful peace operations are well known and will doubtless form the basis for the panel's examination of their task. These are that each operation should have an achievable mandate, the co-operation of the parties and proper resources to do the job, to which we might add the political will of the Security Council to see the job through and the flexibility of the Secretariat to allow the administration to base its work on the overall priorities of the mandate.

And on the United Nations' capacity for rapid deployment:

When the Security Council has decided to establish a peace mission it is vital that the various components—military, civilian police, civilian staff arrive swiftly—even if the early arrivals are only temporary. Member States must be asked to take measures to ensure the rapid recruitment and deployment of competent military personnel and police ... Countries, which are able to do so, should place stand-by forces and police at the disposal of the Secretary-General. Special attention should be paid to the importance of providing a number of "instant packages" deliverable at short notice.

Finally, on resources and structure at Department Headquarters:

The abiding impression of senior visitors to the policy areas of the Department of Peacekeeping in New York is one of a department which is working under enormous pressure with a lack of human resources and above all a lack of time. The constant pressure of in-house meetings coupled with the demands of Member States and the inexorable tidal flow of events in the Security Council mean that there is little time to draw breath, let alone indulge in the "luxury" of dialogue and policy development. The answer to this lacuna is relatively simple—additional middle-level staff in the relevant departments and a

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much closer relationship between the Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Political Affairs.

There needs to be a change of culture in New York ... The capabilities of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations need to be augmented; with this and the careful choice of senior experienced staff, I believe that in the medium term the UN will present a more convincing case to manage peacekeeping even when the glass is falling.

Before going any further, let me set for you a scenario: A country, divided for two or more years as a result of areas that had a minority ethnic group breaking away from the central government. All but one of those areas has been returned to central government control by force. The remaining “rebel” area is small, with a population of less than a quarter of a million, but contiguous with a large and supportive neighbour. The military liberation of this last corner would cause much bloodshed and is considered undesirable by the international community.

A peace accord is put in place, which guarantees the peaceful transition of this territory back into the mother country over a given period of time with considerable protection for the remaining minority population. The accord is followed by the intervention of a large UN force together with a civilian component and an SRSG with plenipotentiary power. Over a two-year period, there is a slow withdrawal of forces and a transition of power. The transition works.

This scenario sounds idealistic, but it actually happened in UNTAES (the UN Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia), one of the most successful UN missions in 50 years. Clearly, there are many lessons to be learned from this.

The advantages of the plan for UNTAES were (1) its conciseness, (2) the extent of governing authority it bestowed on the transitional administrator, (3) the integrated chain of command from the transitional administrator on down and encompassing all military units, and (4) the clarity of mission objectives, including full demilitarization and the establishment of a transitional police force and civilian government structures to replace illegitimate authority. All this was incorporated in (5) a rigorous time schedule.

In contrast to the fully integrated UNTAES mission, the Dayton Accord mandated an unprecedented number of international organizations to pursue peace, but did not create an effective co-ordinating mechanism. In Europe, so many organizations are seeking a role that what seems to result is an inefficient and dysfunctional structure as was the case in Kosovo, where an assortment of international institutions is involved in peace building. Apparently, the lessons of the past are learned slowly.

Recently I was talking to Dr. John Mackinlay of Kings' College London, who said, “in UNTAES, you have shown that the UN can run an operation—keep the peace—when the weather is relatively fine, but the perception is still that you can not do so in a storm. You can not do it in particular because the Department of Peacekeeping in New York is weak and the culture there is wrong. Under these circumstances it would be a courageous permanent representative of the UK in New York who encouraged Her Majesty's Government to commit a battalion of UK forces under UN control in a warlike situation.”

My immediate reaction was to rehearse the usual arguments about P-5 (the five permanent members of the Security Council) responsibility, plethora of mandates and resolutions. But actually he is right. There needs to be a change of culture in New York—and I am glad to say Brahimi goes some way to address this. The capabilities of DPKO (the Department of Peacekeeping Operations) need to be augmented; with this and the careful choice of senior experienced staff, I believe that in the medium term the UN will present a more convincing case to manage peacekeeping even when the glass is falling.

The new Under-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping Operations, Jean-Marie Guehenno, is taking vigorous measures to make DPKO's management capacities more effective, and to strengthen and reform the department's structure. He outlined some of these measures to the Fourth Committee in November, including some key structural changes that are essential at this stage.

First, the creation of a third Assistant Secretary-General for Military and Civilian Police Affairs to bolster the management team of an expanding department and to give priority to the relations between the department and troop- and police-contributing states.

Second, a restructuring of the military division, including the designation of senior officers to oversee the distinct tasks related to: mission planning, force generation and management of the UNSAS (the UN Standby Arrangement System) for military personnel, training and evaluation and military operations.

Third, strengthening of the Civilian Police Unit in DPKO and enhancing the role of the Civilian Police Adviser.

Fourth, creation within DPKO of a public information unit, drawing on the support of DPI (the Department of Public Information).

Fifth, transformation of the Lessons Learned Unit into a peacekeeping doctrine and best-prac-

tices unit. He wants the new unit “to become the change manager of the department, developing best-practice procedures, enhancing the institutional memory of DPKO, and having a strong input during the planning of new operations.”

Lastly, creation of a small gender unit in DPKO to ensure the systematic integration of gender perspectives in peacekeeping operations.

Letter—Courier

SIR—Regarding “Canadian Politics and One-Party Government,” by Jeffrey Simpson (Jan/Feb. 2001). While newspaper editorials are promoting the idea that the Progressive Conservative party should join hands with the right-wing Alliance under the rubric of uniting the right, it is overlooked that the Liberal Party has been able to unite the centre, where most voters reside, and is in the process of becoming, like the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan, the sole governing party of Canada.

Despite many scandals, the LDP has ruled Japan since the end of the World War II mainly because Japanese voters don’t see any credible non-ideological alternative. Of course, the LDP also benefited from Japan’s post-war economic boom. But through most of the 1990s Japan has been in recession and scandal after scandal has rocked the LDP. Yet Japanese voters continue to make it the largest contingent in the Diet. The party has been able to regroup after every scandal and win the election mainly because its right-wing and left-wing opponents have failed to inspire. The LDP’s strength lies in the fact that, like the Liberal Party of Canada, it is not tied to either right-wing or left-wing ideology.

The current Prime Minister, Yshiro Mori, is extremely unpopular as a result of his inability to act decisively during the recent accidental sinking of a Japanese fishing trawler by an American nuclear submarine. Under pressure from his own party, he has announced that he will resign next month after presenting the budget. Yet despite the LDP’s woes the opposition parties are so divided between right and left that they have failed to gain support. The only party that has gained in popularity is the Communist Party of Japan, which has presented itself as market-oriented socialist party. But this will not be enough to beat the LDP, which retains its credibility among mainstream voters.

The same has happened to Canada. While the Conservatives and the Alliance are trying to win right-wing votes, the Liberal Party has been able to

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attract the mainstream. Like their Japanese counterparts, mainstream Canadian voters don’t find any credible alternative to the Liberals. Moreover, the Liberals seem to have taken most of the wind out of the Alliance’s sails by adopting the most stringent budgetary regime in generations and replacing the budget deficit with an enormous surplus. Public concerns have shifted to finding more resources for health care, education and the environment—hardly strong points for the Alliance. The Liberals’ \$100 billion in tax cuts is another page stolen from the Alliance platform. The Liberals now seem unassailable from the right, which leaves the right-wing parties in disarray.

The Progressive Conservative party used to be a mainstream party, one the voters could elect if the Liberals veered too much to the right. Now with the Conservative Party trying to become another right-wing party and with right-wing voters being such a small minority, the Liberal Party seems poised for permanent victory. In the last election, Japan’s united right-wing populist parties went down to stunning defeat at the hands of the LDP. Canada’s Liberals will do the same to any united right-wing party, since most Conservative voters are likely to switch to the Liberals if the PC Party and the Alliance join hands.

As McGill Prof. Elisabeth Gidengil pointed out in *The 1997 Canadian Federal Election*: “The Liberal party was acceptable to a definite majority of Canadians: ... as many as 60 per cent of voters would have had the party as their first or second choice. And somewhat surprisingly perhaps, the Conservatives were the most frequent second choice, especially those who voted Liberal ... Arguably, Charest and his advisers made the wrong strategic calculation in 1997 election. Instead of targeting Reform, they might have done better to focus on disgruntled Liberal supporters.”

Joe Clark may be making the same wrong calculation by trying to join hands with the Alliance.

Mahmood ELAHI, Ottawa

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