

# Peacekeeping: Only a Soldier Can Do It

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## Introduction

It was in the beginning of the nineties that the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Boutros Boutros Ghali came with his ambitious plan called 'The Agenda for Peace'. In that document the UN would play an important role in preventing and resolving of conflicts.

The document was a reaction on the changed security situation in the world. The situation in Europe was totally changed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emerging of new democracies. In the Middle East a large coalition of the willing and able had liberated Kuwait after the invasion by the forces of the dictator Saddam Hussein of Iraq. Even there was some hope in a settlement of the conflict between Israel and the Palestine. At that time the Administration of the United States of America did not want to play an international 'police role'.

The 'Agenda for Peace' was a blueprint for peacekeeping operations for the future. It starts with conflict prevention and it ends with post-conflict building. When the early warning system of the international community has failed, and a conflict breaks out, the UN has to act and to settle the conflict as soon as possible. Peacekeeping units will pave the way for a peaceful settlement and the build up of the conflict area.

The 'Agenda for Peace' was based on the principles of classic peacekeeping. That was a big mistake. Because a new security situation requires new answers.



## **Peacekeeping: the classic approach**

Peacekeeping is an invention of the UN itself. It was a concept developed because the Military Committee as foreseen in the Charter did not in practice. The basis for peacekeeping operations is laid down in Chapter VI (Peaceful settlement of conflicts) and VII (Actions as result of threatening of peace, disrupting of peace and acts of aggression) of the UN Charter. Most of the peacekeeping operations in the past were based on Chapter VI. The UN Security Council (with a mandate for the OSCE within the OSCE area) is the only legitimate authority to approve peacekeeping missions. Since the early fifties, the functions of peacekeeping are threefold<sup>1</sup>. First of all it is that of defusion. Parties in conflict will accept a cease-fire and a withdrawal of their troops by using the peacekeepers as a face-saving device. Otherwise the deployment of peacekeepers as an — in between force — can prevent parties to go to war. The second function of peacekeeping is that of stabilisation. Peacekeepers can create the appropriate circumstances for negotiations after a cease-fire has been established. They can contribute to calmness by removing tensions and preventing incidents. The third function is to provide assistance in resolving disputes.

To implement these above-mentioned functions, the concept of peacekeeping is based on the impartiality of troops. So the peacekeeping contributing countries should have that political approach too. Countries which are in some way involved in the conflict or express their sympathy for one of the parties involved should not contribute with forces. The military units should be light equipped (not heavy arms) and non-threatening. Both sides should trust them. The use of weapons by the peacekeepers is primarily justified in the case of self-defense. Peacekeepers are operating in white painted vehicles as a sign of their impartiality and non-violence posture.

The so-called classic peacekeeping by UN forces was a success for many decades. It was the only possible way for the UN

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<sup>1</sup> Peacekeeping in International Politics, Alan James, ISS London, 1990



during the bi-polar system to act in a military way. But in the early nineties, when the bipolar system of power did not work any longer, the UN made the mistake to approve peacekeeping missions which the same set of rules and principles which did not fit to the changed security situation. The mission in Bosnia in the mid nineties was an example in which the UN failed as a result of using the old concept which didn't fit to the changed security environment. It showed that UN missions could not always be impartial and non-threatening. As a result of the failed UN missions on the Balkan but also in Rwanda and Somalia the UN started with a revision of its concept. The report of Mr Brahimi in 2001 stated very clear that the UN peacekeeping missions should be more robust and more backed with a wider mandate to act in a proper way to the situation on the ground. It also acknowledges that the UN is not the proper organisation for leading military missions, which are of an other character than the classic UN-missions. UN peacekeeping operations (pko) should preferable carried out by organisations, which are more suited to conduct military operations.

### **Peacekeeping since 1995**

The changed security situation requires a new approach. Since the dramatic results of the UN mission in Bosnia, the UN prefers to hand over the conduct of military operations to other international organisations (NATO, OSCE, CIS) which are better equipped and more successful. So it was primarily the NATO-organisation supported by a lot of non-NATO countries (among them the Russian Federation) which fulfilled their missions based on a mandate given by the UN. The changed view on peacekeeping operations requires different skills of the military. Sometimes they have to act in the same mission in a non-threatening posture as well as in a threatening posture. The equipment has to apply to both situations. The UN-mission in Afghanistan is quite different in relation to the UN-mission in Cyprus, which is a typical classic one. One of the new challenges for pko is the post-conflict period. If there is in the former conflict area only poorness, illness,



unemployment and remnants of hatred it is the basic material for a new conflict. The build up of the area in the postconflict situation is very important. This is not primarily a military task but a pko can create the necessary safety conditions for other organisations to do their job.

## **Standby High Readiness Brigade (Shirbrig)**

After the failure of the UN in Ruanda (1994) to prevent genocide, a couple of countries (among them the Netherlands, Canada and Denmark) tried to improve the rapid availability of troops for pko. It was a response to the statement of Koffi Annan. He stated that if he have had a unit of 5000 soldiers, the genocide in Ruanda could have been prevented. The present UN-system, so-called UNSAS<sup>2</sup>, did not fit to the change security situation in which the quick readiness of troops is essential. In 1998, about ten countries decided to a permanent headquarter that could be called up for pko. The headquarter was established in Copenhagen (Denmark) and acted perfectly for the first time in a classic pko (UNMEE) in Eritrea. The contribution of troops was tailored to the area. The Shirbrig is not a UN unit or HQ but available for UN missions. Every country can contribute to Shirbrig. The CIS-countries are not yet represented.

## **The Dutch experience**

In the beginning of the nineties the Dutch government with the approval of the parliament decided to take an active policy posture in the contribution to peacekeeping operations. The cold war was over and the main task of the armed forces was no longer focused on Eastern Europe. But instead of that, new security risks appeared. The defense policy stated that every Dutch military unit has to be ready to contribute to pko. The government and the parliament discussed extensively about the elements, which would

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations Standby System (UNSAS) is list of military assets of the UN memberstates, which are in principle available for peacekeeping operations.



be part of the political decisionmaking process. A review of the Constitution was the result. The promotion of the peace and stability and the maintaining of the international law are part of it. However the Dutch government needs the final approval of the parliament if they decided to take part in a pko. The Dutch experience in Bosnia was also a reason to review that process. One of the new elements which have been added to the list of criteria is the availability of an exit-strategy and the element of risk-sharing.

In its proposal to participate in a pko, the government has to take in account a list of criteria, which has been approved by the parliament. These criteria plays an important role in the final decision in the case that the Netherlands is willing to contribute to military missions abroad.

Another important aspect is the care about the military, which are involved in pko. Almost every pko leads to casualties, wounded soldiers and mental damage. Research has showed that about 5% of the soldiers involved in pko have some physical and/or mental damage. It is very important that the armed forces have developed a long-term follow up care system.

The cost of pko missions is only refunded in the case when the mission is executed by the UN itself. In all other circumstances it is important that there is a special budget for the participations in pko missions, which is also transparent to the parliament.

## **Criteria for the political decision — making process**

### **National interest**

The government has to make it clear what the specific national interest is to take part in a mission. The national interest is not limited to a narrow notion. The violence on a large scale of human rights can be a reason to take part in a pko. Also the support of a friendly country can be a reason to contribute.

### **Political goal**

The political goal of the mission must be achievable by executing a military operation. Sometimes the first reaction of politicians and public society when they watch large-scale violence is to send soldiers. But a good analysis on beforehand of the real



situation is needed. A military operation is not a panacea for every situation. If the political goal is clear and achievable through the use of military means, an analysis of risks is needed.

### **Risks**

Governments and parliaments send soldiers to conflict areas because they are educated, trained and equipped for these situations. So a military mission without risks is hardly to imagine. But not every price is acceptable. There is a relationship between the national interest and the acceptance of risks. To contribute to a mission in a far away country where there is a lack of real national interest, the society and the politicians will not accept a lot of casualties. So in the Dutch case, the parliament will not easily approve a pko with a high risk profile and a low profile of national interest. Very important is the risk sharing. For medium-sized countries like the Netherlands, which is not a member of the UN Security Council, it is not wise to take all the responsibility or risks in a mission. It is preferable to share the responsibilities and risks in pko with large countries, which are represented in the UN Security Council. If that was the case in Srebrenica (1995) it is my opinion that the enclave was not attacked by the Bosnian Serbs.

### **Mandate and Rules of Engagement**

The mandate for a mission determines the operational performance of that specific mission. For a classic UN Mission based on Chapter VI a limited mandate and Rules of Engagement are sufficient. For all other pko a wider mandate is needed. When the UN mandate is not suitable in relation to the real situation on the ground, parliaments should not give the green light for contribution. If the mandate meets the political and military requirements, it is very important that the Rules of Engagement (RoE) are clear, sufficient and applicable. The Rules of Engagement are the practical guidelines for the soldier to perform its daily work. The mandate and the RoE are decisions of the UN Security Council. Robust RoE must prevent that soldiers during their duty have to watch with tied hands the violation of human rights and the killing of innocent people.



### **e. Fixed term**

When the decision is made to take part in a pko, it is important for political as well for operational reasons to agree on a period that a country contributes to a pko. An open-ended agreement can lead to misunderstanding between government and the parliament and even in deception. For the armed forces it is for planning reasons important what the future requirement are. The principle used in the Netherlands between government and parliament is that a contribution is fixed to a 6 month period, which the possibility to review the contribution for another period of 6 months.

### **f. Exit-strategy**

When circumstances changes and the mandate can not be fulfilled any longer, the withdrawal of troops (with or without consent of the involved parties) can be an option. Such a withdrawal (for e.g. the US troops in Somalia) should be prepared in advance. Not every country is able to conduct withdrawal operations due to a limitation of military assets. (air— and sealift, combat— and transporthelicopters etc.) In that case the exit strategy has to work out with other countries which are willing and able to support the evacuation of troops of other contributing countries. The Netherlands had prepared withdrawal plans with other friendly countries during their pko in Eritrea/Ethiopia, Afghanistan as well as in Iraq.

## **6. Training and exercises for peacekeeping missions**

A peacekeeping mission requires different skills from the military. As the late Secretary General of the UN, Dag Hammerskold said once it is not a soldier's job but only a soldier can do it. The regular basic education for a soldier is not sufficient. A peacekeeper has to fight in the last place. Most of the times he has to act as a diplomat, a negotiator or as an observer. It is important that countries which like to contribute to peacekeeping operations develop specific training for their soldiers and (nco) officers. In the Netherlands (and some other countries) has its own



Peacekeeping Training Centre. Also the implementation of the lessons learned from other missions is important. Every military unit or individual which has been appointed for a pko has to fulfil the training. This of course is not limited to educate military skills but also the input of civilians and specialist of the area of conflict have their input. Understanding of the culture and nature of the population in the mission area is important.

## **Operational Command**

Every nation keeps the full command of its own troops during peacekeeping missions. The operational command is handed over to the military commander of the organisations, which conduct the pko. In practice it can be a UN commander but also a NATO commander or a commander of an ad hoc coalition like ISAF. In practice the full command is restricted to one option: the military units can be called back by the respective government. That means the end of the mission.

## **Parliamentary control**

In most of the democratic countries the parliament has to approve the national contribution for peace keeping en peace support operations. It is recommended that the approval is based on realistic information. Even a list of criteria, as used in the Netherlands, can be helpful. It obliges the government to look carefully to all these aspects and to include them in the decision-making process.

Once parliament has approved a pko, it is necessary that during the mission the parliament get a regular update of the political situation and risks. When the mission have been finished, the government should evaluate the mission to draw lessons for future missions. The evaluationreport should be sent to the parliament for further debate.



## Conclusions

- a. Since the early nineties peacekeeping operations are not limited to the classic pko lead by the UN. A new range of pko (operations other than war) is the answer on the changed the security environment.
- b. Not the UN, but other organisations like NATO, CIS, OSCE or coalition of the willing and able can conduct pko with a mandate of the UN Security Council.
- c. A UN mandate and the Rules of Engagement (RoE) should be proper formulated to meet the requirements of the soldiers in area of peacekeeping area. Robust Roe's are required to prevent that a mission fails. In pko, which does not meet the classic situation, the military units and soldiers should be equipped, as the mission requires.
- d. Soldiers need appropriate pko training and education, which is not, limited only to military skills.
- e. The parliamentary oversight is very important for the democratic control on pko. Every parliament has to develop the best practice for it. In The Netherlands, both government and parliament uses a set of criteria in their decisionmakingproces.