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RETHINKING THE UNITED NATION'S ROLE IN PEACEKEEPING:

LESSONS FROM EL SALVADOR

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Since the Cold War the United Nations has greatly expanded its role in peacemaking and peacekeeping operations. By focusing on what is touted as one of the United Nation's most successful operations, El Salvador, this paper analyzes the United Nation's general strengths and weaknesses in this expanded peacekeeping role. While highlighting the United Nation's unique strengths of impartiality and moral authority, it also illuminates its weaknesses, including limited expertise in many peacebuilding measures, such as institutional design and reintegration. In conclusion, given the financial limitations it faces, the United Nations should focus its resources on coordination of international efforts and creation of international standards in post-conflict reconstruction and not in the implementation of peace accords. Undertaking this new, more limited, role would provide an authoritative role for the United Nations, improving the overall performance of comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives by limiting current cross-purpose interactions of UN and non-UN activists and implementers without threatening its main source of strength: its reputation.

As has been duly noted in literature on the United Nations, the end of the Cold War brought a new effectiveness to the Security Council. This translated into an increasingly active role for UN missions. Moving

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beyond traditional peacemaking and peacekeeping in interstate conflicts, UN operations undertook intrastate conflict resolution and expanded the definition of peacekeeping to include greater post-conflict involvement. Furthermore, some UN mandates explicitly or implicitly incorporated peacebuilding measures, aimed at resolving the underlying issues that precipitated conflict.

This newly expanded role for the United Nations has been supported as well as challenged. Many applaud its move into intrastate conflict resolution, viewing it as a natural adaptation of its mandate to uphold international security, given the changed nature of conflicts. Others feel that the United Nations is overstepping the bounds of its original charter and its area of expertise. Particularly as the number and complexity of these types of operations increased in the 1990s, and as the failures mounted, challenges to this new role for the United Nations rose. Many of the questions revolved around the following issues:

- What are the aims of UN involvement in peacekeeping in the post-cold war global system?
- To which aspects of peacekeeping is the UN particularly suited?
- What are the limits of UN effectiveness in peacekeeping operations?

Debates over these theoretical issues influence UN strategies toward conflict resolution, and toward its role in complex, multi-task peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. While remaining a controversial and unresolved topic, situations in need of intervention continue to appear, and UN-led peacekeeping and peacebuilding remain the favored means of action.

In reflecting upon, if not answering questions about the United Nation's longer-term role in intrastate conflict and peace maintenance, looking to past actions and operations is essential. The recent spate of second generation peacekeeping operations provides several examples of "successes" and "failures."¹ By focusing on what is touted as one of its greatest successes as a peacekeeper and peacebuilder, we should be able to analyze the United Nation's general strengths and weaknesses in its new peacekeeping role in the best possible light. This noted success is the United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador (ONUSAL). Created to monitor the results of negotiations between the El Salvadoran government and the Farabundo Marti National Front (FMLN), ONUSAL expanded its initial human rights mandate to encompass broad peacebuilding measures, such as the construction of new security and judicial institu-

tions, as well as the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants. This emphasis on post-conflict peacebuilding made ONUSAL the first UN multidisciplinary peacekeeping operation.

The El Salvadoran case was exceptional due to favorable external and internal political factors. Nevertheless, the United Nations played a decisive role in peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Yet reviewing the events of UN actions in El Salvador, one can delineate specific strengths and weaknesses of even a successful peacekeeping operation. From this one example, one can infer general lessons for peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations. These lessons highlight unique strengths of the United Nations, its impartiality and its moral authority, as well as its weaknesses, including limited expertise in many peacebuilding measures, such as institutional design and reintegration. Particularly given the financial limitations it faces, the United Nations should focus its resources on coordination of international efforts and creation of international standards in post-conflict reconstruction and not in the implementation of peace accords. Undertaking this new role would improve the overall performance of comprehensive peacebuilding initiatives by limiting current cross-purpose interactions of UN and non-UN activists and implementers. In addition, such efforts fall within the UN's area of expertise, providing an authoritative role for the UN in peacekeeping without threatening its main source of strength: its reputation.

CHANGING ROLES: PEACEKEEPING AND PEACEBUILDING

While the end of the Cold War allowed the United Nations greater flexibility in peacekeeping operations, greater UN involvement in intrastate conflicts and in the implementation of comprehensive peace accords has resulted from the active leadership of recent secretary-generals. In his *Agenda for Peace*, Boutros Boutros Ghali laid out new definitions and new directions for the United Nations in the post-Cold War era. Moving beyond more limited peacemaking, the secretary-general strove to integrate preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. In his definitions peacekeeping was expanded and redefined to include protection of humanitarian operations, designation of safe areas for civilian populations, and pressure for national reconciliation (United Nations General Assembly 1995). In addition to the expansion of this older concept, Boutros Ghali introduced a new term and new territory for UN operations: peacebuilding. Peacebuilding was defined as efforts to "identify and support structures which will tend to consolidate

peace and advance a sense of confidence and well-being among people” (Boutros-Ghali 1992, point 55). This vague description was meant to encompass strengths, such as its demobilizing and reintegrating irregular forces, restructuring and creating police and judicial institutions, monitoring elections, fostering economic development, and resolving any other issues at the root of internal conflicts. The breadth of this definition allowed considerable leeway in mandate design and operational activities. Peacebuilding, combined with a broader interpretation of peacekeeping, moved the United Nations in a new direction in international security maintenance, allowing and justifying such interventions as those in Central America, Somalia, Mozambique, and Bosnia.

THE CENTRAL AMERICAN PEACE PROCESS

From the 1960s until the late 1980s, Central America earned the unfortunate distinction of being a Cold War showcase. Both the United States and the Soviet Union showered technical assistance, military aid and equipment on competing political and military groups within these five small countries. In El Salvador alone, the United States is estimated to have spent over six billion dollars in weaponry (Blum 1998). The militarization of the region and relatively easy access of multiple groups to arms heightened not only the intensity of domestic conflicts but also interstate tensions. These tensions stemmed from longstanding border disputes as well as from the flow of armed insurgents and military patrols across densely vegetated borders.

While ideological and political tensions continued to dominate foreign interests and internal policies in Central America during the early 1980s, local and regional efforts to reach peaceful settlements grew in scope and sophistication. Turning away from the historical domination of the United States, medium-sized Latin American countries joined together to form the *Contadora* group, to aid resolution of Central American conflicts (Child 1992).² These efforts provided a basis for subsequent indigenous efforts, conducted by the presidents of the five Central American countries, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Intense negotiations between these leaders culminated in the 1987 signing of the Esquipulas II Agreement. This accord committed each government in Central America to a cease-fire, national reconciliation, amnesty for irregular forces, democratization, and an end to aid to insurgency movements. It also opened a path for third party verification of compliance with Esquipulas II, which was undertaken by the United Nations and the Organization of American States (Child 1992).

The latter 1980s brought international changes that provided new opportunities for peaceful resolution to the region. Foremost was the ending of the Cold War as the easing of ideological polarity between the United States and the Soviet Union created space for compromise between rival groups. Additionally, the determined stand of the Reagan administration against the spread of communism in the Western Hemisphere gave way to a more pragmatic Bush administration. Uncertainty surrounding future military aid and declining current aid levels altered previous calculations and commitments to indefinite conflict on both sides of the ideological fence.

Finally, the length and the brutality of the civil wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador (and finally Guatemala) created a popular war weariness which aided the resolution of conflict. Precipitous economic decline throughout Latin America and the hardships endured by the people in war-torn countryside diminished the value of vague, long-term ideological gains. With either side unable to enforce a decisive military conclusion, popular exhaustion enhanced the incentives of both government leaders and the guerilla opposition to reach an agreement to end the overall suffering and to begin rebuilding.

El Salvador

In El Salvador, the civil war was devastating. Some 75,000 citizens died during the conflict, 500,000 were internally displaced, and 890,000 migrated to the United States, Belize, Mexico, Honduras, and Guatemala out of a total population of approximately 5 million (Casasfranco 1997). The root of the conflict resided in the vast inequality of wealth and land distribution, protected through violent means. Landlessness among *campesinos* increased dramatically in the decade before the civil war, from 27 percent in 1971 to 65 percent in 1980 (Casasfranco, 1997). This land grab was facilitated by close cooperation between economic elites and the military, which controlled the political system. The power and impunity of the military establishment, comprised of the armed forces and controlling the national guard, treasury guard, and national police force, brought increasing repression and violations of human rights in the 1970s and early 1980s. This economic, social, and political injustice polarized and politicized social groups, leading finally to civil war. Answering the question why guerrillas were in the hills, former military junta member Jose Napoleon Duarte stated “fifty years of lies, fifty years of injustice, fifty years of frustration. This is a history of people starving to death, living in misery. For fifty years the same people had all the power, all the money, all the jobs, all the education, all the opportunities” (Blum 1998).

Increasingly militarized dissident groups banded together to form the main guerrilla force in El Salvador, the FMLN. While never a match to the military's strength (particularly given its military assistance from the United States), the FMLN effectively maintained control of significant territorial zones, and pursued a strategy of economic sabotage in government controlled areas. The FMLN maintained strong support throughout its domestic areas and received support from many external sources, including the Sandinistas in Nicaragua.

However, the diminishing antagonism of the Cold War and the reconciliation between the Contras and the Sandinistas in Nicaragua greatly influenced the El Salvadoran move toward peace. Domestically, the narrow defeat of a FMLN military initiative in San Salvador led to a decisive military stalemate. The combination of external and internal factors led both the FMLN and the El Salvadoran government to ask the United Nations to assist a negotiation process aiming at reconciliation.

For a two-year period, UN representatives and Secretary General Javier Perez del Cuellar were intricately involved in mediating the peace process and in creating the final comprehensive peace agreement, signed on 31 December 1991. These accords encompassed broad ranging compromises and reformulations, including the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants, institutional changes in the security, political, and judicial structures, and in-depth investigations of human rights abuses. With the successful conclusion of its role as chief mediator to the agreement, the United Nations became chief verifier and implementer, transforming its role from peacemaker into peacekeeper and peacebuilder.

ONUSAL (1992–1995)

Created by Security Council Resolution 693 in May 1991, the UN Observer Mission in El Salvador began its assignment by monitoring human rights abuses (United Nations Security Council 1991).³ After the signing, ONUSAL's preliminary mandate expanded to include monitoring and verification of the Agreement. Specific areas of concern included the "purification" and reduction of the armed forces, the organization of a new national civil police (PNC), the demobilization of the FMLN, the reintegration of ex-combatants through transfers of land and provision of credit and training, and the creation of a more representative democracy by opening the political system (United Nations General Assembly 1992).

While the mandates of previous UN peacekeeping missions focused strictly on verification and monitoring, ONUSAL's activities far outstretched an observer role. ONUSAL participated in creating new institutions, in pressuring compliance with sequenced deadlines, and at times in

negotiating new concessions to maintain or further the peace process. This mandated activist role included assistance to the new security forces, cooperation with the office of the human rights ombudsman, and the recommendation of binding reforms of the judiciary.

These extended responsibilities placed ONUSAL “nearly at the level of a cogoverning body, albeit without enforcement capacity” (Baranyi and North 1992, 33). While some of the tasks and their coordination were transferred to the local United Nations Development Programme office and its officials, ONUSAL maintained control of most of these operations, forming separate human rights, military and police divisions, and subsequently an electoral division (United Nations Security Council 1993).⁴ Its first group, the human rights division, was mandated by the agreement to establish two formal investigative committees, the Ad Hoc Commission and the Truth Commission (United Nations General Assembly 1992).⁵ The Ad Hoc Commission was created to “purify” the armed forces of abusive officers. Comprised of three El Salvadorans, the commission investigated some 230 senior officers during its three-month mandate. Its September 1992 report recommended the dismissal of the entire senior military staff. Remarkably, these recommendations were eventually complied with, often through transfers or retirements, though not on the originally scheduled timetable and not without great pressure from the United Nations and other international forces (Johnstone 1995).

The Truth Commission, composed of three foreign experts, was designed to “investigate serious acts of violence that occurred since 1980 and whose impact on society urgently require that the public should know the truth” (Johnstone 1995, 34). While having no prosecutorial power, its recommendations with regard to legal, political, and administrative measures were agreed to be binding.

Its final report cited human rights abuses by both sides but recognized that the majority of violations were committed by the El Salvadoran military. The commission recommended broad reforms, including the dismissal from office or military service of all persons named in the report, the resignation of the entire Supreme Court, and broad changes to the structure of the judicial system. Government and judiciary reactions were initially confrontational, accusing the commission of overstepping the bounds of sovereignty. While many of the recommendations were in fact implemented, those requiring constitutional amendments were not, despite their binding nature. The call for dismissal of human rights abusers was not initially heeded, and the immediate passage of an amnesty law limited the potential for future justice.

In addition to the two formal Commissions, ONUSAL's human rights division was responsible for assisting the institutionalization of the National Council for the Defense of Human Rights. While the ombudsman's office was imbued with legal power to investigate cases of human rights abuses as well as to recommend legislation regarding judicial and administrative reforms, it did not avail itself of this broad mandate (Johnstone 1995). Due to the counsel's initial weakness, ONUSAL's human rights division took upon itself to conduct many of the human rights investigations, using its external authority to further inquiries.

The military division was assigned with the task of demobilizing the FMLN and collecting its weaponry. After significant demobilization and weapon collection had occurred, the division was downsized, though some responsibility for reintegration of ex-combatants was added to its tasks (United Nations Observer Mission).

While demobilization was officially completed at the time of the ceasefire, UN assurances of demilitarization were rudely contradicted by the explosion of an illegal arms deposit in a Nicaraguan garage in May 1993. Afterward, the FMLN admitted to significant arms caches both within El Salvador and abroad (United Nations Observer Mission). These further revelations to the United Nations enabled the FMLN's recognition as a legal political party in the coming 1994 electoral race, but the incident highlighted the limitations of the military unit.

The police division, CIVPOL, was charged with monitoring the creation of a new National Civilian Police (PNC), as well as monitoring the activities of the old militarily-controlled national police (PN) until its dissolution and replacement by the PNC. In addition, the accords mandated the creation of a new National Public Security Academy (ANSP) responsible for training the supervisors and officers of the future civilian police force. While planned to supervise over 600 observers, CIVPOL never comprised more than 314 people (Stanley and Loosle 1998). These personnel limitations reflected the limited number of countries able and willing to send qualified participants, as well as the necessity of government and FMLN acceptance of candidates.⁶ While smaller than originally planned, this division took an incredibly activist role towards its mandate, consistently surpassing a monitoring role to further the goals of security and well being in its areas of participation. Activities included designing much of the curriculum for ANSP, training new police officers, sharing resources with current forces, and engaging in *de facto* police work, including protecting civilians, investigating crimes, locating and questioning suspects and accepting complaints (Fagen 1996).

As one UN official said, "In many parts of the country ONUSAL police were the police (Stanley and Loosle 1998, 34)."

While its policing efforts were well received by the population, its monitoring efforts were less successful. The old PN and military proved unwilling to provide CIVPOL with personnel records that would enable verification of human rights records of officers nominated to participate in the PNC. From within the PNC, new leadership (appointed by the government) stonewalled CIVPOL from monitoring the placement of military recruits within the organization (United Nations Observer Mission). While CIVPOL doggedly pursued compliance from both the military and the El Salvadoran government, which neglected its responsibility to provide monetary resources and political support for the PNC, it was often ineffective.

CIVPOL was not the only organization dedicating time and resources to the institutional restructuring of security forces in El Salvador. The United States had its own police training and security institution-building organization on the ground, the International Criminal Investigative Assistance Program (ICITAP). This organization was a crucial ally for CIVPOL for a number of reasons. First, ICITAP had a much broader professional staff to draw upon. While no UN agency concentrates solely on the institutional development of police forces, ICITAP is a fully funded U.S. government agency dedicated to this cause (Call 1998). ICITAP also had the benefit of tenured professionals familiar with general and specific obstacles to the creation of a new police force. While CIVPOL personnel were routinely rotated through the El Salvadoran mission, ICITAP's leadership remained in the country for six years, allowing the creation and usage of on-the-ground contacts and knowledge.

Additionally, ICITAP benefited from being the principal funder of the institutional reform process. The United States contributed \$11 million of the total \$13 million designated for the creation of ANSP. The United States was the largest donor to the overall police project, contributing \$25 million between 1992–1997 (Call 1998). As a result of its economic muscle, ICITAP was able to successfully promote the original accords by conditioning aid on compliance. This was particularly crucial at times when the government and/or military were in direct violation of the letter and spirit of the peace agreement (Stanley and Loosle 1998).⁷

The electoral division was charged with ensuring that all decisions and actions of the electoral authorities be impartial and consistent with the goal of fair elections, that election processes be constructed so as to guarantee fair voting procedures, that freedom of expression and political

campaigning be allowed in the run up to the election, and that the right to vote be respected on the actual election day. Comprised of 36 professional staff, the electoral division was to report any complaints, criticisms, or objections raised to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE), a newly created government agency charged with coordinating and implementing all the aspects of running fair elections.

While ideally the support of ONUSAL would have strengthened the new agency's capacity as an independent observer and supporter of free elections, the TSE was politicized and incompetent. Rather than a receiver of complaints, it became a source of them. After the adoption of complicated registration requirements and techniques (over the objections of ONUSAL advisors), TSE proved incapable of administering its chosen system. As a result, ONUSAL's electoral division assumed many logistical tasks for TSE, including locating birth certificates in municipalities and assisting the completion of registration applications (Montgomery 1995). Some 900 observers watched the 20 March 1994 elections. In his May 1994 report the secretary general stated that "Elections [were] held under generally acceptable conditions, without any major acts of violence, although serious flaws regarding organization and transparency were detected. These were not, however, deemed to have had an effect on the final outcome (Boutros-Ghali 1994b)."

Nevertheless other observers and non-governmental agencies questioned this interpretation, citing flagrant systematic abuses, violations of electoral law and technical fraud. Polling booths were opened late and closed early and votes cast in some areas outnumbered potential living voters while in others registered voters were turned away. ONUSAL itself later estimated that 100,000 potential voters were unable to vote in the 1994 election, and other organizations have estimated this number to range between 200,000 to 400,000 out of the total 1,430,000 votes cast (White 1994).

The speed with which the United Nations verified the electoral proceedings and results was subject to local criticism, both from other activist organizations and from within the United Nations itself. This, and other superficial treatment of compliance led one UN official to express the feeling that the United Nations wanted simply "... to get out of the place as soon as possible with its victory intact" (Hill and Malik 1996, 168).

ANALYSIS: CHALLENGES TO UN PEACEBUILDING

While reconciliation in El Salvador and the transition to a more open democracy can be considered relatively successful, ONUSAL was unable

to overcome many of the challenges it faced. ONUSAL's limitations can be broadly classified into conjunctural or case specific, and structural reasons, pertaining to contradictions between the UN philosophy and structure and the needs of comprehensive peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Conjunctural reasons played a great part in creating the opportunity for the initial peace negotiations, i.e., the end of the Cold War, decline in US military aid, and regional peace efforts, but they also limited the effectiveness of subsequent peace consolidation efforts. One of the main factors hindering successful implementation of the agreement was the lack of political will among many of the El Salvadoran participants, particularly the military and the conservative government. This inertia was most noticeable with respect to follow through on deep structural reforms delineated in the initial peace agreement and later in the Truth Commission report.

The establishment of the PNC and subsequent dissolution of the PN were marred by a persistent lack of resources from the government and often outright violations of both the letter and spirit of the peace agreement. The lack of cooperation and compliance also affected the human rights efforts of the Ad Hoc and Truth Commissions. Many of the binding recommendations of the Truth Commission, concerning both the dismissal of tainted personnel and the restructuring of judicial and military institutions to prevent future abuses and impunity, went unheeded.

As an active but unarmed observer, the United Nations can encourage but not enforce actions, even if previously agreed to by both parties. The successes of peacebuilding efforts, in the end, were determined by the political will of the participants to the peace agreement: the FMLN and the El Salvadoran government. While ONUSAL and other international organizations helped propel forward institutional reforms and changes, they could not compensate when the most vital conjunctural factor, political interest or will, was lacking.

While some of the mission's limits to UN achievements can be described by time and place specific factors mentioned above, many reflect the limitations of UN intervention more generally. It is these structural limitations of UN involvement that are the most important to consider when evaluating the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping operations, and when formulating the methods and goals of future projects.

The first of these is the United Nation's lack of expertise and adequate resources in many areas of peacekeeping, in particular that of peacebuilding. Throughout its operation, ONUSAL's military unit lacked the necessary personnel, tactical mobility, or advanced technologies to investigate ex-

combatant claims of demilitarization beyond face value (Hill and Malik 1996). This led to near disastrous consequences for the peace process when previous ONUSAL guarantees of FMLN disarmament were proven false. These limitations were also present in the efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants. While the El Salvadoran UNDP office was charged with carrying out many of the reforms, its strength lay in long-term rural development projects. The United Nation's lack of expertise in its areas of responsibility, the reformulation of security institutions and the urgent needs of reintegration, quickly became apparent (Holiday and Stanley 1993).

In addition to the limits of UNDP experience concerning these specific issues, the perennial UN problem of coordination between agencies reduced the effectiveness of the overall mission. While some examples of cooperation occurred between the UNDP, United Nations Commission for Human Rights and other organizations in the Development Programme for Displaced, Repatriated and Refugee Populations and in support of demobilization, concerted interaction was short-lived. Concrete joint work plans were never formed (Raheem, Khader and Benbouali 1996). Even ONUSAL's own divisions, such as the police and human rights divisions, had a difficult time coordinating their actions and establishing adequate information flows irrespective of domestic barriers (Stanley and Loosle 1998).

While one could argue that many of the problems (though not all) regarding expertise could be overcome with the provision of adequate resources and support, this is not currently a viable solution. The cool reception of Boutros Ghali's *Agenda for Peace* demonstrated the limited support of the major powers for the enhancement of UN responsibilities and skills. Without the backing of these states, the resources for the development of adequate expertise will not appear. While lamenting this state of affairs, a potentially constructive response is to look beyond UN peacekeeping operations themselves to other smaller and more focused agencies and organizations that can provide the necessary services. These could include domestic and international non-governmental organizations as well as governmentally sponsored organizations.

A second problem with UN peacebuilding in intrastate conflicts is the inherent state-centered approach of the United Nations and its agencies. When dealing with irregular forces as party to an agreement, the necessarily state-focused administration of the United Nations and its agencies limits the expression of alternative voices in guiding the direction of reform, partially sustaining the exclusionary situation that originally led to conflict.

This problem troubled ONUSAL and the UNDP in their implementation of general social reforms. As a state-centered organization, the UNDP maintained formal working relationships only with the El Salvadoran government (Montgomery 1995). While the UNDP and other UN agencies encouraged the inclusion of non-governmental organization and demilitarized FMLN community proposals in the National Plan for Reconstruction, these requests primarily went unheeded. Despite the exclusionary stance taken by the government, the UNDP could not undertake such community-based proposals for reconstruction itself. Rather, it was forced to support what became, by some accounts, a biased plan for the provision of infrastructure to territories supportive of the conservative ARENA party, and which neglected previously FMLN controlled territories (Fagen 1996).

Ominous ramifications of state-centeredness appeared in the implementation of human rights investigating and reporting. The inherent contradiction between the United Nation's role as impartial observer and active protagonist placed ONUSAL in an almost untenable position, given its need for consent from the greatest perpetrator of human rights abuses (the El Salvadoran government) to continue its mission. While overall, the human rights division did strengthen the recognition of abuses, it has been criticized for its timidity in publicizing cases pertaining to government abuses (Baranyi and North 1992). Its insufficient fulfillment of this human rights mandate was brought to light in 1992 when a former ONUSAL employee publicized several human rights cases that had been previously quieted by ONUSAL (Holiday and Stanley 1993). This limitation reflects in part the preference of some El Salvadoran leaders on both sides to move beyond accusation to reconciliation (Johnstone 1995).⁸ But it also stemmed from the United Nation's potentially untenable position as a human rights guarantor requiring the continued consent of suspect parties.

Finally, the role of the United Nations in creating and transforming domestic institutions can limit long-term sustainability by displacing local initiatives. Successful results of extra-national organization interventions can be difficult to maintain once that organization is no longer involved. The tendency in El Salvador for ONUSAL to take on the work of inefficient local organizations or government departments in the promotion of peace potentially limits the long-term sustainability of the reform process.

The electoral division, while it can be credited with making the 1994 elections more open and inclusive than previous elections in El Salvador,

perpetuated the existence of a dysfunctional electoral system and government agency, the TSE. While its assumption of the logistical role provided short-term benefits, this intervention by the ONUSAL did not encourage or force the development of an adequate domestic electoral institution. As much is admitted in a letter from the secretary-general to the Security Council, which concludes "Subsequent to these elections problems remain in terms of the organization of elections, in particular concerning the preparation of the electoral roll, and there is an evident need for a thorough reform of the electoral system" (Boutros-Ghali 1994a). In the end, as a result of its extensive intervention, ONUSAL did not leave El Salvador prepared to conduct its own elections.

This unforeseen consequence of UN activity also affected the development of the human rights ombudsman office. While in the short term the UN strategy to take on cases may have promoted greater publicity for the findings, it did not help strengthen the skills of those working in the counsel, or increase the counsel's authority within El Salvador.⁹ Reliance on extra-national organizations to administer and complete wholly domestic transformations does not promote the institutional development so necessary for the long-term maintenance of solutions.

While at times alleviating the need for domestic institutional development, broad mandates of international organizations can also limit the perceived need of additional foreign aid or continued support of alternative non-governmental organizations. El Salvador had a long history of church-affiliated and other non-governmental organizational involvement in human rights, social and economic justice issues. The 1993 ninth human rights report of ONUSAL's human rights division recognized this base, stating "The Salvadoran NGOs . . . constitute the most functional complement to the activities of international verification" (Blackmore 1994). Yet while awarded such recognition as major factors in the move toward peace, ONUSAL's interaction and cooperation with NGOs on the ground was fairly limited. In fact, some argue that ONUSAL replaced these more indigenous organizations, gaining more international recognition, thereby decreasing the perceived need for alternative organization funding in the country (Holiday and Stanley 1993). By not enhancing the role of these advocates, ONUSAL missed a chance to transfer its authority and legitimacy, and to enhance longer-term sustainability of reforms. UN limitations due to expertise, state-centeredness, and lack of embeddedness in domestic structures remain generic problems in the current means and methods of UN involvement.

AN ALTERNATIVE APPROACH

The expansion of UN peacemaking and peacekeeping mandates into intrastate conflicts reflects the reality of international peace and security today. As shown in El Salvador, the United Nations is often uniquely suited to moderate between two distrustful parties, even when one is not a state body. As an honest broker, the United Nations was able to provide a forum for discussion and negotiation that no other organization (particularly the U.S.-controlled Organization of American States), could provide. The United Nations also holds considerable expertise in mediation, which was successfully drawn upon in initial and later negotiations.

Yet when one steps beyond these unique and cultivated peacemaking strengths to peacebuilding initiatives, such as the reform of judicial and security institutions, the reporting of domestic human rights abuses, and the demobilization and integration of irregular forces and army personnel, one can question the necessity and even desirability of UN involvement.

While the need for a party to help rebuild a state and society after devastating violent conflict is self-evident, the question remains whether the United Nations is best suited to the peacebuilding tasks that come in the wake of successful mediation and negotiation phases. The United Nations may indeed be the best organization to monitor and verify compliance, due to its reputation for impartiality and its mediation expertise as continued disputes will undoubtedly arise. But verification responsibilities are just the surface of the activities that the United Nations is actually taking on, as can be seen from the El Salvadoran example. While the United Nations is likely the best observer of such activities, it may not be the most attuned in assisting the creation or implementation of processes necessary to maintain compliance. Rather, organizations with expertise in the specified field, i.e., police training and judicial reform, or organizations focused on grassroots populations may be better implementers than states. Trying to fulfill both roles, the United Nations is much more likely to stray from its premise of neutrality and from its area of expertise. This endangers not just the outcome of the current mission, but also the UN's overall reputation and future effectiveness. The United Nations should not reject missions simply due to fear of failure, but it also must be cognizant of its organizational and structural limits. While in an ideal world the funding and training necessary for the United Nations to be an expert advisor in every area of peacekeeping and peacebuilding would be available, this is not the current case.

An obvious partial resolution to the United Nation's financial limitations is to promote greater coordination between the agencies involved in

peacebuilding measures in conflict-torn areas. General UN reform proposals partially verbalize this idea, focusing on increasing communication and coordination between the various organizations of the UN system, including both technically subordinate agencies as well as the Bretton Woods institutions. Additionally, current secretary-general Kofi Annan has stressed the need for the United Nations to work with other groups and organizations, including NGOs, civil society and academia (Annan 1998).

Yet while these initiatives and ideas are being pushed in the debates about UN reform in general, a concerted effort in the peacekeeping arena must be made. Rather than pushing for greater expertise and planning within the UN system which, so far, has had little success, I would suggest a new role for the United Nations in peacekeeping operations: coordinator of and standard setter for peacebuilding policies of all active organizations.

This role would bring several benefits to the current system of implementation. The first is rectifying the current lack of cooperation between organizations. An estimated aggregate \$4 billion is spent annually on peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations by various organizations whose activities remain uncoordinated and often act at cross-purposes (Chayes, Chayes and Raach 1997). In addition, conflicts abounded between UN-affiliated organizations, particularly between the strict economic policies of structural adjustment imposed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and the expansive spending required to fulfill obligations to reintegrate ex-combatants and to transform security and judicial institutions (De Soto and De Castillo 1994). Conflicts also affected interactions with NGOs and other governmental programs, such as ICITAP (Call 1998). Official UN coordination efforts would ensure that nongovernmental organizations (with their greater ability to reach out to non-state actors), and intergovernmental organizations (with their greater access to funding), were firmly incorporated in an integrated (a more sustainable) peacebuilding approach.

Second, standards for implementation techniques and policy formulation of participating organizations would give greater legitimacy to the coordinated efforts and greater benefits to the recipient state and population. Foreign governments are increasingly searching for international support and legitimation before intervening within other sovereign territories. In the post Cold War period, United Nation's support is the most legitimate stamp for intervention, sought by both small countries and superpowers alike. The United Nation's strength as the impartial observer and harbinger of moral authority in the international sphere makes the United Nations uniquely suited to establish norms of implementation in

peacemaking and peacebuilding. It is here also that it can best use its resources in the field of peacebuilding. Organizations and agencies providing specific services can often pressure for compliance in a way that an impartial observer cannot. But an impartial observer can best ensure that this conditionality is based on fair normative rules, not unilateral political considerations. Laying out “rules of engagement” beforehand, the United Nations can help direct aid in a more beneficial manner. Given the United Nations’ limited economic resources and the benefit its reputation for fairness could provide in these normative areas, the United Nations should rethink its direct role in peacebuilding measures. Standard setting and coordination are no easier tasks than direct implementation. But the long-term benefits, both to the countries directly receiving services and to the UN as a coherent international organization, are potentially greater.

Finally, these measures will serve to enhance, rather than harm, the reputation and ensuing effectiveness of the United Nations. Creating and upholding universal standards will strengthen rather than jeopardize UN authority, which rests almost solely on an intangible reputation. While the United Nations is currently the preeminent and most legitimate international organization, there are parties unnerved by its increased activity and growing autonomy. By expanding without forethought into uncharted territory, the United Nations is left vulnerable to accusations of overall ineffectiveness or incompetence. This in turn can provide excuses for non-payment of dues or reliance either on more easily controlled regional organizations or unilateral action. The United Nations must protect the source of its international power and prestige, its moral authority and reputation for impartiality.

In reality, the United Nations will never fully disengage from some aspects of peacebuilding. It remains the vehicle of last resort when no other international organization or government is willing to step in and aid societies in conflict. Yet in cases where other external and internal supports exist, such as El Salvador, the United Nations can best be the mediator of peace negotiations, the setter of implementation standards, and the coordinator of assistance. The adoption of such a role will be more beneficial to the long-term interests of the country, ensuring a better balance of services needed to rebuild state, society, and democracy. It will also benefit the United Nations, enhancing its own moral authority and longer-term legitimacy.

Notes

¹The broadly mandated, multidimensional peacekeeping and peacebuilding missions of the 1990s are often referred to as second generation peacekeeping in order to distinguish these operations from more traditional interstate conflict resolution and cease-fire maintenance activities (first generation).

²The Contadora group consisted of the foreign ministers of Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela. In 1985 a Contadora support group was formed, which included Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay. Canada provided technical assistance and consultation.

³Its initial mandate was to verify compliance with the San Jose Agreement on Human Rights, signed by the government and the FMLN in July 1990.

⁴At the request of the El Salvadoran government and the FMLN, ONUSAL's mandate was expanded by Resolution 832 in 1993 to include the monitoring of the electoral process and the election of 20 March 1994.

⁵Later, on the recommendation of the Truth Commission, the human rights division created a third committee, the "Joint group for the investigation of politically motivated illegal armed groups."

⁶The FMLN objected to the participation of countries with previous ties to the El Salvadoran military, such as Argentina.

⁷One example is when government-appointed leadership of the PNC ordered ONUSAL to suspend assistance to the PNC.

⁸Both the government and some members of the FMLN were worried that too many revelations might destabilize the peace process.

⁹As ONUSAL was preparing to leave, it changed its strategy and began working more closely with the ombudsman's office.

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