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The Purposes of Peace Operations

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Ever since the United Nations started asking its member states, in the late 1940s, for military officers to observe cease-fires and, in the 1950s, for armed troops to monitor borders and supervise force separations, the purposes of these activities have been dictated case by case, heavily influenced by prevailing global and regional politics and by the national interests of countries on the UN Security Council—the five permanent members in particular. Peacekeepers have been deployed to act as fair witnesses (observing and reporting the facts but without the duty or ability to alter the situation on the ground other than through such reporting); as referees of a peace accord (judging compliance but relying on larger powers to enforce it); as “police” (impartially enforcing an accord through their own authority and means in the short term, using force as necessary, minimally and proportionately, but leaving the long-term verdicts and results to others); as state-builders (in collaboration with the local parties, shifting primary emphasis from security to development as circumstances and local capacity permit); or as state surrogates (responsible for reconstruction of the apparatus of governance, and for governing until such apparatus, and the human capacity to run it, can be prepared to supplant such outside support).

Practical considerations and precedent—likely traceable to UN envoy Ralph Bunche¹—established local consent, mission neutrality, and non-use of force (if there was an option) except in self-defense as the de facto principles of peace observation and traditional (border zone) peacekeeping. As defining terms for peace operations, however, they proved inadequate for more complex peace operations like the UN’s involvement in the former Belgian Congo (1960–64). There, a mixed civilian-military force became deeply embroiled in both Congolese and Cold War politics, protecting those trying to build a new political consensus, protecting at least some civilians at risk from violence, ousting mercenary troops (albeit haltingly) from a secessionist province, and otherwise far exceeding the purposes of peacekeeping established to that date. The new definition—new essence—of peace operations that this experience offered was rejected, however, by both UN professionals and UN member states; and not regenerated until

two decades later when fading Cold War tensions ushered in a whole new generation of peace operations.

This essay traces the evolution and adaptation of peace operations, first to the Cold War and then the post-Cold War environment, and more recently to a new post-9/11 era in which the ever-expanding purposes of peace operations is blurring the line between peacekeeping and war-fighting, posing a threat to its identity as a security-related military function that is honorably separable from war. It concludes with some thoughts on why that separation should be restored and how that might be done.

Operations before *Agenda for Peace*

The first UN operations were fair witnesses. The UN Security Council authorized deployment of the first unarmed UN military observers to assist the work of the Consular Commission monitoring a shaky cease-fire between Dutch and Indonesian forces on Java in August 1947 and authorized similar support in April 1948 for the Truce Commission established to monitor the Armistice Agreements between Arab and Israeli forces.² The term “peacekeeping” was not coined to describe the tasks of UN-mandated troops or observers, however, until the Suez Crisis of 1956 and only gained some official status when the UN General Assembly set up the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations in February 1965, just after UN forces finished their operation in the Congo.³

Peacekeeping became a strategic tool by which the United Nations Security Council could help keep conflict-prone parts of the international system from shaking the stability of the Cold War standoff. Peacekeepers were allowed to bear arms for self-defense beginning in 1956 when Lester Pearson, Canada’s Minister of External Affairs, imagined a force in the Middle East “large enough to keep these borders at peace while a political settlement is being worked out”—although the United Nations remained averse to using the arms that its forces could now bear.⁴

¹ Bunche supervised the setup of the UN Truce Supervision Organization in the Middle East in 1948. See Brian Urquhart, *Ralph Bunche: An American Odyssey* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), 161, 169.

² The Middle East observer force still exists. See Mona Ghali, “The United Nations Truce Supervision Organization,” in W. Durch, ed., *The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 84–103. The observer mission on Java is less well known. The Consular Commission established there by UN Security Council Resolution 30 of 25 August 1947 called upon the Commission’s constituent states (Australia, Belgium, Republic of China, France, UK, and USA) at its first meeting on 1 September 1947 to provide a total of 24 military officers to observe the cease-fire lines between Dutch and Indonesian forces, later expanded to 60. For extensive documentation, see Peter Londey, *Other People’s Wars: A History of Australian Peacekeeping* (New South Wales, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2004), 16–28. For a discussion that takes a longer look at peacekeeping and peace observation, see Alan James, *Peacekeeping in International Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1990). See also Birger Heldt and Peter Wallensteen, “Peacekeeping Operations: Global Patterns of Intervention and Success, 1948–2004,” 2d ed. (Sandöverken, Sweden: The Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2006), 4.

³ Indarjit Rikhye, *The Theory and Practice of Peacekeeping* (New York: St. Martin’s for the International Peace Academy, 1984), 1. For a good history of the evolution of terminology see Trevor Findlay, *The Use of Force in UN Peace Operations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1–2.

⁴ Trevor Findlay, *The Use of Force in Peace Operations*, (Oxford: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2002), 20.

UN peacekeepers were used as “police” in the early 1960s in the former Belgian Congo but thereafter fell back to fair witness mode. They became referees again in the late 1980s, in Namibia (1989–90), Central America (1988–94), Angola (1991–98), and Mozambique (1992–94). The referee role worked well enough except in Angola, where it failed to keep war at bay, twice, with disastrous local consequences. Greater nominal authority was given to the mission in Cambodia (1992–93) to manage and safeguard processes—including elections—intended to end the country’s long civil war and give it legitimate government. It succeeded in part, conducting the elections but lacking the power to enforce the results when the governing party disagreed with them.

From *Agenda for Peace* to the Brahimi Report

In January 1992, the first Security Council summit asked the new UN secretary-general, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to report on ways to strengthen UN capacity for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacekeeping. By that time, peacekeeping already had been repurposed, case by case, as a tool to help implement internal political settlements (as in El Salvador, Cambodia, and Angola) and referee determinations of post-colonial status (Western Sahara). In his July 1992 report to the Council, the secretary-general attempted the Secretariat’s first working definition of peacekeeping, but so tepidly that one could not guess from reading it the momentous shifts in purpose then underway.⁵ An *Agenda for Peace* thus missed an opportunity to bind peace operations to purposes consistent with its traditional essence and left the Council freer than it might otherwise have been to keep adding new purposes. These included remaking the Somali government over the objections of powerful local faction leaders, and intervening in Bosnia on a very large scale, in an ongoing war, to mitigate suffering—but not end it. This continued until peacekeeping failed not only in Somalia and Bosnia but also in Rwanda, failing either to anticipate or to stem the genocide of April–June 1994. In January 1995, Supplement to an *Agenda for Peace* cataloged the new purposes but finessed the discussion of their failure and especially the high human costs of that failure.⁶

These results discredited complex UN operations for a time, and most peacekeepers in the latter 1990s deployed under the banner of NATO and sub-regional organizations, not the United Nations. It came as a surprise, then, to the UN Secretariat in particular, when the revival of complex UN peace operations by the UN Security Council began at the largely-untried higher end of the peacekeeping hierarchy – as “state surrogates” and “state builders” in Kosovo and East Timor, the former with an undefined political end-state and the latter with an ill-trained population previously subject to a quarter-century of Indonesian domination and four centuries of Portuguese colonial rule. Thus came unprepared new administrators to govern populations that were either resentful but ambitious (Kosovo) or dogged but unprepared (Timor).

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Shortly after these missions deployed, the Brahimi Report revisited the definitional issue:

Peacekeeping is a 50-year-old enterprise that has evolved rapidly in the past decade from a traditional, primarily military model of observing ceasefires and force separations after inter-state wars, to incorporate a complex model of many elements, military and civilian, working together to build peace in the dangerous aftermath of civil wars.⁷

A complex peace operation, according to the report, represented the joining of peacekeeping with peace-building (“activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and [build] ... something that is more than just the absence of war”).⁸

The Brahimi Report addressed peacekeeping’s past and ongoing failures (the operation in Sierra Leone appeared to be

⁵“Peacekeeping is 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. Peacekeeping is a technique that expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace.” Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace*, 2d ed. (New York: United Nations, 3 January 1995), 45 (the July 1992 definition). This definition is anything but essence-focused, being so bland as to mention only one of the three ostensible “pillars” of peacekeeping, and then in a way that suggests its imminent obsolescence. Do peacekeepers watch, report, fight, run fast? We aren’t told.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 9–11, 14–19.

⁷ United Nations, *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, A/55/305-S/2000/809, 21 August 2000, para. 12.

⁸ *Ibid.*, paras. 13, 18.

falling apart as the report was being written) and insisted: that troop contributors send well-equipped forces to UN operations; that mandates allow military initiative in dangerous environments; and that “impartiality” be redefined to mean “adherence to the principles of the Charter and to the objectives of a mandate that is rooted in those Charter principles,” rather than arms-length neutrality. In dangerous situations with “obvious aggressors and victims,” peacekeepers, it argued, “may not only be operationally justified in using force but morally compelled to do so,” and should therefore be equipped with “robust rules of engagement.” Conversely, the Secretary-General and his team needed to give the Security

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Council the unvarnished version of conditions in the field, telling their political bosses what they needed to know, not what they wanted to hear.⁹ That worked for awhile, but the Council soon tired of hearing regularly that it was trying to force the United Nations to perform beyond its innate capacity in places like Darfur, Chad, or Somalia.

From the Brahimi Report to Afghanistan and Darfur

The sentiments in the Brahimi report, minus the tiresome advice about brutal honesty in assessing prospects for success, were embraced by the Security Council for virtually every new UN peace operation authorized in the new century. By mid-2008, over 80 percent of the troops and police deployed in UN-led operations functioned under mandates that invoked Chapter VII of the UN Charter (the enforcement chapter).

Although the Brahimi panel stressed that “the United Nations does not wage war,”¹⁰ the reality of robust peacekeeping is

such that the institution now finds itself in situations where it must take forceful action if its robust mandates are not to be forfeited. Such was the situation in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo in the summer and fall of 2008, where peacekeepers found themselves caught between rebel forces, former Rwandan genocidaires, and an incompetent but predatory national army that they were supposed to be supporting. Meanwhile, in Darfur, Sudan, government obstruction and harassment of the UN force continued well into its second year of attempted deployment, risking general mandate failure and certainly a failure to protect Darfur’s victims of violence.

Continuing a decade-long trend, developed states and institutions were willing to fund, advise at a distance, and provide a degree of logistical support to such beleaguered UN operations, but not willing to contribute troops, tactical transport, or air cover. They can make these choices and still look in the mirror daily because their troops, transport, and air power (some of it) are engaged in Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, or Afghanistan.

The UN Secretariat did manage to argue its way out of leading international peacekeeping forces in Afghanistan in 2001, before the Council had grown inured to carefully-documented arguments about a new mission being too hard, or half-measures being too risky. Instead, it authorized the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)—initially coalition-based, later NATO-led—to undertake peacekeeping in the capital, Kabul, and separately authorized a UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to provide political support and coordination of other international assistance. While ISAF patrolled Kabul, UNAMA was responsible for helping the country’s interim government implement a peace process agreed to in Bonn, Germany, in December 2001. That process culminated in a new constitution and elections by fall 2006 but Afghanistan was far from stable thereafter, with a peacebuilding process that moved ahead unevenly, parceled out by sector amongst seven lead donors. The country’s formal economy faltered as its opium-fueled shadow economy took off. The

⁹ Ibid., paras. 48–50, 55, 64d.

¹⁰ Ibid., para. 53

ousted Taliban meanwhile regrouped in the borderlands of Pakistan, learned lessons and borrowed technology from the war in Iraq, and gradually built back their fighting strength. Peacekeepers in Afghanistan were therefore increasingly confronting an insurgency.

From Robust Peacekeeping to War Fighting?

Peace operations are most often born and built in crisis, and function in a realm of partial control and competing priorities that is intrinsic to multi-national or multi-lateral organization. Their lack of innate organizational coherence reflects their practice-based, case-driven history and the locus of primary political-military power in states rather than in the organizations that most frequently sponsor these operations. Every actor involved in post-conflict reconstruction efforts, large and small, official or not, is both independent and protective of its own turf.

These characteristics make peace operations poor templates for the sort of unified command and unified action required by war fighting. This does not mean that peacekeepers never have to fight, only that they are, structurally, not very good at it. Yet major power military doctrines have been evolving almost in lockstep with one another over the past 15 years toward just such a melding of peacekeeping and war fighting. Over the same interval, however, national interests in taking the risks entailed by more robust peace operations have not changed that much. The result is a series of operational, doctrinal, and interest-based dilemmas for robust peace operations to which we now turn.

Operational Dilemmas

Peace operations work best when they are not only authorized internationally but invited to deploy under the terms of a peace agreement, offering an operation both local and international legitimacy. A regional or UN mandate can be reassuring both to the host state (as a political barrier to unlimited outside interference) and to the provider (as a tool to prevent

mission creep or the growth of unrealistic local expectations regarding outside aid). If and when the going gets rough, an international mandate is also a license to canvass for additional international help.

Complexity creeps in, of course, in conflict zones that are only partly pacified, that fall back into violence as a peace process stalls, that harbor parties who resist constraints on their illicit income, or that generate splinter groups who try to muscle their way into a share of political power. Part of a peace operation may need to adopt a combat “stance” in which defeat of such an opposition force may be temporarily required. Such has been the case periodically for UN forces deployed in eastern Congo. UN operations elsewhere in the DRC, however, involve little or no proactive use of force and the whole operation is broadly invitational, deriving its welcome from a series of national-level peace accords as well as Security Council mandates.

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NATO operations in Afghanistan benefit similarly from Council mandates. However, as all international military activities there coalesce under a single command and political stability falters, areas that have until recently been largely free of orchestrated violence are experiencing increased risk, and it is increasingly difficult to distinguish NATO-ISAF’s peacekeeping role from NATO’s growing counterinsurgency role in the southern and eastern parts of the country.

At least in Afghanistan the central government is playing on the same side as the peace enforcers. In Darfur, the situation is even more complicating. The AU-UN hybrid operation in Darfur, UNAMID which has a clear UN mandate, faces willful

opposition from a virulently anti-UNAMID Sudanese government that banks on other states' reluctance to challenge its sovereignty, even to halt the violent surrogate campaign that it wages against segments of its own people. To mount such a challenge directly, the sponsoring organizations and troop contributing countries would have to cross a line that few are willing to cross except when at war—coercing Sudanese compliance with international resolutions, using military force to resist government obstruction of UNAMID deployments, and otherwise taking actions difficult to distinguish from warfare and military occupation.

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These examples illustrate that robust peace operations can only be so robust before the distinction between peace operations and warfare begins to break down. The distinction is not semantic, but strategic. Thus, in that peace operations have not traditionally declared enemies—where an enemy is defined and identified to be a legitimate target of lethal military force wherever encountered, and toward whom the operational objective is victory. By this light, NATO forces in southern Afghanistan that attack identified Taliban targets with lethal force without waiting to be fired on first or even necessarily to be targeted first are waging war, not participating in a peace operation: The enemy is generically defined and targeting generically legitimated. Rather, peace operations have been intended instead to vanquish conditions that contribute to conflict or human suffering. This objective may require a forceful defensive response when an operation's work is challenged, and may require taking the initiative if tactical intelligence indicates that this is the best way to pre-empt an imminent attack, especially one that is likely to cause, or is aimed at causing, considerable civilian casualties.

But for peacekeepers, these are last rather than first resorts. Finally, peace operations have not traditionally conducted what the US military would call “opposed entry,” or intervention against armed opposition. Such action may well be necessary to protect a population at risk, but it constitutes war. A duly-authorized peace operation may well be the follow-on to such a war, as was the case in Kosovo; but the two do not equate. (There was a partial exception in East Timor, where a UN-mandated multi-national force (Interfet) fought against local armed opposition to enter the island – but only after the consent of the far-larger Indonesian armed services had been secured through a diplomatic process.)

Doctrinal Dilemmas

Military doctrine is the compilation of experience and belief about “the best way to conduct military affairs.” Its level of focus can range from abstract principles of warfare to “organizational doctrine” about the roles and missions, current objectives, and current best practices in the employment of forces by a particular military organization for a particular purpose or in a particular setting.¹¹ Doctrine for peace operations is about such specific functions and settings, as well as basic principles and strategic objectives. Although the outcomes of wars are often determined by high-level military decisions and large operations, in peace operations, the actions of even small groups of soldiers (led by the canonical “strategic corporal”¹²), can have major implications for local stability and achievement of the mission. Doctrines for peace operations, then, lay out how key organizations and entities recommend handling such a strategic burden, including at the lowest, tactical levels of deployed forces. Examining how they have changed in response to field experience can yield important insights into how key security providers view the changing strategic environment of peace operations and fit it into the larger mix of military missions.

Fifteen years ago, peacekeeping was doctrinally and operationally segregated from war-fighting by major powers, perhaps to protect peacekeeping from association with war

¹¹ Dennis Drew and Donald Snow, “What is Military Doctrine?” in *Making Strategy: An Introduction to National Security Processes and Problems*, (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 1988).

¹² Gen. Charles D. Krulak, “The Strategic Corporal: Leadership in the Three Block War,” *Marines Magazine*, January 1999.

fighting; perhaps to protect the war fighter's ethos or skills from being weakened by rapid or frequent exposure to the more restrained world of peacekeeping. Today, however, key major power doctrines, including those of the United States, United Kingdom, France, and India, give peacekeeping a place on a continuous spectrum of tension that has war fighting at the other end. The motivation now, as defense resources in many countries thin out, seems to be the construction of an omni-competent force that can spin on a dime—physically, operationally, and psychologically—from peacekeeping to war-fighting, including counter-insurgency or counter-terrorist operations, as complex circumstances dictate.

It is not at all clear, however, that soldiers are collectively capable of doing as much role-shifting, as rapidly, as doctrine now seems to require. One could envisage such adaptation in a 34-year-old Special Forces sergeant with 15 years of experience and special education and training in winning local support for his campaign. One has more trouble seeing it in a 19-year-old line infantryman with a high school education and at most a year of field experience of any sort under his belt. In all armies, the latter-type personnel far outnumber the former.

The recent evolution of major power doctrines for peace and stability operations suggests that the old walls that initially segregated peace operations from war-fighting are crumbling. The more difficult and risky of peace operations and the lower ranges of war fighting are increasingly viewed as differing in degree more than in kind. Rather than buy into the relatively humble, if risky, world of peacekeeping as a confidence-building measure, a temporary security presence, or a support agent for the voluntary dismantling of belligerent factions and restructuring of host state security forces, these powers reconceptualize peace operations as low-intensity conflict with a hearts-and-minds annex. Rather than rely, going in, on local consent as a source of operational legitimacy, these doctrines posit that firm and fair implementation of post-conflict reconstruction in an atmosphere of growing public security and tranquility will generate local consent.

After years of missteps, the United States may be demonstrating that proposition in Iraq, but few operations of any sort have the resources of the entire US defense establishment on which to draw. More likely they will have far too few resources and, as in Congo, not only find themselves outnumbered by local fighters but the object of civilian anger as the goal of civilian protection remains unmet.

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Experience in the new decade suggests that there is yet life in the notion of consent, in some form, as a prerequisite to peace operations and as a feature that distinguishes them from other military action. That is the definitional direction in which the United Nations has tacked most recently, against the flow of doctrine from the great powers. One might argue that the UN has been responsive instead, to the interests and fears of its majority membership. United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, Principles and Guidelines, the most recent UN effort to define peacekeeping, takes a more conservative, contrarian approach to doctrine.¹³ Issued in January 2008 by the best practices section of the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, this “capstone” document (so called because it sits atop a large framework of more specialized guidance and operating procedures) defines peacekeeping as a “technique designed to preserve the peace, however fragile, where fighting has halted, and to assist in implementing agreements put into place by peacekeepers.” Peace enforcement, on the other hand, “involves the application...of a range of coercive measures, including the use of military force” as mandated by the Security Council. The document argues that “robust” peacekeeping is permitted at a “tactical level with the consent of host authorities and/or the main parties to the conflict” but that such action is different in kind from peace enforcement at a “strategic or international level.”¹⁴ In taking this approach,

¹³ UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and UN Department of Field Support (DFS), *United Nations Peacekeeping Operations, Principles and Guidelines*, January 2008, 18, pbpu.unlb.org/bbps/Library/Capstone_Doctrine_ENG.pdf

it fights the contemporary trend toward doctrinal and operational convergence, fencing off peace operations as a distinctive enterprise with distinctive purposes.

Mission Objectives versus National Interests

A further complication that arises from the blurring of the line between war-fighting and peacekeeping extends from differences in the motivations of contributors to peace operations. In the United Nations, at most fifteen countries decide to go forward with a peace operation (although the membership at large must agree to fund it). In NATO or the European Union, slightly more than two dozen states, give or take, make the decision; in the African Union, it is ten to fifteen (the members of the Peace and Security Council). Those decisions are based

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on staff work that has laid out the structure and objectives of an operation. That work may or may not be based on close consultation with potential troop and police contributing countries. Even if based on such consultation, the states that agree to contribute personnel will not all see the world alike, and they will place differing political constraints on the personnel they contribute. This has been the historical burden of multilateral peace operations, but as their purposes become broader, less predictable, and more risky to execute, these differences matter more. States' calculus about risk to troops and sustainability of domestic support is likely to change, and the availability of troops and police and the coherence of missions—and not just UN missions—are likely to suffer.

This would matter less if there were dozens of troop contributors willing to take these risks, but that is not the case. In most regional organizations, a minority of larger powers tends to contribute the bulk of peacekeeping troops, as well as the bulk of the organization's funding. An even smaller minority may be willing to put its troops in harm's way on behalf of a peacekeeping mission. Thus, in NATO, the principal fighting forces come from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, and now perhaps France, while other members, although fielding troops, strive to minimize their exposure to combat. In European Union field operations, the main combat risk thus far has been borne by France. In African Union operations, Nigeria, Ghana, Rwanda, Senegal, and South Africa have been key troop contributors. The United Nations similarly relies on a comparative handful of states to fill out its uniformed ranks: 15 states contribute 75 percent of UN forces. Loss of any of the major South Asian contributors would hurt UN capacity badly, as would loss of any large African contributor. As so many large UN operations are in Africa, African troop and police contributions are at least as important politically as they are operationally.¹⁵

UN operations offer unusual opportunities for field experience to the developing countries that contribute most of its troops and police. There is also prestige associated with international deployments, perhaps a sense of competition with regional rivals, and UN troop reimbursements may offer a net financial gain to the contributing government. Given the increased risk associated with many current UN operations, such gain might be considered the equivalent of hazard pay. However, none of the above motivations necessarily incline a contributor to take risks with those it sends to UN operations. The more democratic the state, the less inclined it may be toward such risk, given the potential for domestic political backlash should national personnel be lost. Wealthy states also stress loss-avoidance, and most of their commitments to UN operations are monetary in nature, plus logistical support, sometimes through private sector contractors.

¹⁴ Ibid
¹⁵ Four European states (France, Italy, Poland, and Spain) provide over half of the troops for UNIFIL in southern Lebanon (and 7 percent of total UN forces); European troops are scarce amongst UN operations in Africa, however. Over-1,000 contributors from Latin America include Uruguay (Congo and Haiti) and Brazil (Haiti). China sends troops and police to several venues in Africa, to Lebanon, and to Haiti, while Indonesia deploys in Lebanon and Congo. The Latin American and East Asian contributions are about 4 percent apiece. Together with the top 15, these states account for 90 percent of deployed UN troops and police. UN Dept. of Peacekeeping Operations, "Ranking of Military and Police Contributions to UN Operations," 31 August 2008; see also Annual Review of Global Peace Operations, 2008, Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2008.

These tensions look likely to be played out, and not for the good, in the contemporary mission that potentially most conflates peacekeeping and war-fighting. Particularly, Somalia, where Ethiopia and Eritrea have waged a proxy war, the former with tacit US support. Huddled near the Mogadishu airport, recreating a scenario that played out previously in the fall of 1992, is a small force of peacekeepers—then from United Nations, now from the African Union—who are largely powerless to defend even themselves.¹⁶ Now, as then, a replacement force is in the wings; is to be UN-led; and is to replace both its weak multilateral predecessor and the Ethiopian Army. It will face, however, even tougher collective opposition and lower prospects of success than did the 1993 UN operation, and since that mission failed almost completely, these prospects are low indeed.¹⁷

Conclusion

Peacekeeping is a very useful tool of international politics, but an inherently limited tool. It can and must take on violent local challenges to peace implementation, but only at the margins of a peace process. Should the core of that process lose cohesion, a multinational operation will itself have insufficient cohesion—and likely insufficient military strength—to make the center hold. This is the main risk of repurposing peace operations as a low-intensity variety of war fighting, especially if those who must vigorously tout the new purpose are not willing to put their own forces where the Security Council votes to invite others to deploy.

Peace operations, especially UN operations, therefore should be distinctly conceptualized. A peacekeeping operation should be one that has international legitimacy derived from an international mandate, and local legitimacy derived either from invitational language in a peace agreement or from its actions in implementing such an agreement: curbing deadly residual violence and protecting the population. Ideally, it enjoys the consent of all local parties initially but can work with partial absence of consent and should be prepared to deal with decayed consent.

Legitimacy and consent are, to a peace operation, what body armor is to an infantry soldier: something to reduce the probability of catastrophic system failure. At the same time, there are limits to the use of force in peacekeeping operations and the UN capstone document recognizes those limits: groups of soldiers are not the same as an army. To the extent that the great powers define their own military activities in terms of limited warfare that does not entail the calibrated use of force or a need for international endorsement, they are describing something other than peace operations. The U.S. government is therefore correct to define the adjuvant functions of forces in combat zones as “stability operations” instead of peacekeeping or peace operations.

A peacekeeping force may need to undertake combat activities in certain places and at certain times, combat cannot be a baseline stance. . .peacekeeping should be kept honorably distinct.

Although a peacekeeping force may need to undertake combat activities in certain places and at certain times, combat is not and cannot be its baseline “stance.” Should combat become a routine preoccupation, then the operation has transitioned to something else, regardless of who mandated it or what that initial mandate said. That is not to say that stability operations or authorized war-fighting operations will not be needed. But peacekeeping should be kept honorably distinct.

¹⁶ As of November 2007, there were an estimated 5,000 Ethiopian troops in Somalia; the African Union Mission to Somalia (AMISOM) had an estimated 2,500 troops on the ground, about one-fifth of its total proposed strength. International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance 2008* (London: Routledge, 2008): 313.

¹⁷ The United Kingdom, although later voting in favor of the resolution, did raise these issues in discussions over the UN replacement force.

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