

## Is a Standing United Nations Army Possible—Or Desirable

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## Is a Standing United Nations Army Possible? Or Desirable?

The current state of U.N. military operations, especially in the area of peace enforcement, is not sustainable. A large disparity exists between international expectations and existing U.N. capabilities which, if not addressed, could undermine the effectiveness of the United Nations and weaken international norms. The question is how to address this disparity.

I shall argue that the formation of an effective standing U.N. army is neither possible nor desirable in the foreseeable future. Instead, it is both preferable and possible to seek incremental steps that could narrow the gap between expectations and capabilities and ultimately enhance the power of the United Nations.

If a fundamental transformation of the United Nations became possible following the collapse of the U.S.-Soviet rivalry (and it is not clear that it ever was possible), the most opportune moment for change—the months immediately following the Persian Gulf War of 1991—may have passed. The births of both the League of Nations and the United Nations immediately followed major wars that altered international politics because the dominant world powers were able to exploit unique moments of opportunity. Although the expedient interests of these powers were the driving force behind change, the result was, nonetheless, the creation of long-lasting and consequential multilateral institutions. The end of the 1991 Gulf War may have temporarily provided another opportunity for transformation, largely because the United States was widely believed to wield extraordinary power in international affairs (perhaps even more so than it actually did). This perception was based on U.S. performance in the Gulf War and the appearance that the United States had won the Cold War against the Soviet Union. At that moment, when prevailing global alliances were disrupted, the United States could have acted to preempt a rethinking of global interests by other nations. The United States might have had some success in mobilizing the international community to change U.N. institutions (although I am not here taking a position as to

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whether such a move would have been desirable for the United States). Now, however, that moment may have passed. As new patterns and new rivalries have emerged in international relations, it has become clear that perceptions of U.S. power far exceeded reality.

Nonetheless, much reform can still be accomplished, and there are good reasons for the United States to seek these reforms. Although the U.S. Congress is in no mood to be kind to the United Nations, strictly selfish calculations on the part of the United States and other permanent members of the Security Council suggest several benefits from enhancing U.N. capabilities. All major powers have problematic interests in world affairs which they do not consider "vital," and for which they are not willing to commit substantial unilateral resources. Multilateral efforts may be the best way to address these interests.

However, international organizations have not been sufficiently bolstered to fill the existing need, and opportunities for enhancing U.N. capabilities remain. Certainly, the scope of intervention by international organizations, especially U.N. intervention, has increased substantially since the end of the Cold War. In recent years, U.N. interventions have taken place almost as frequently as they did during the span of decades which marked the Cold War. The costs of the U.N. peacekeeping operations in Cambodia in 1992-93 (\$1.3 billion) surpassed the combined costs of all U.N. peacekeeping operations in the previous forty-six years.<sup>1</sup> Yet, these impressive numbers evidence only the increased frequency and size of U.N. activities rather than demonstrate fundamental change. Thus, while opportunities for important enhancements of U.N. capabilities remain, they should not be exaggerated; serious barriers to anything but limited incremental steps exist.

Two separate barriers prevent fundamental change such as creating an effective standing U.N. army. The first barrier pertains to U.N. structural changes that would be necessary to effectively accommodate such an army. The second relates to the changing targets of international intervention and the shifting functions of U.N. intervention.

### I. Structural Barriers to a Standing U.N. Army

Despite some progressive incremental change in international norms of intervention,<sup>2</sup> a fundamental problem remains in that the United Nations is still an organization which represents states whose interests are often not harmonious, and whose power, even within the United Nations, is unequal. Structurally, the value of membership in the U.N. Security Council (UNSC) increased substantially after the end of the Cold War. Ultimately, it is the UNSC that interprets the U.N. Charter, establishes new international norms through resolutions, and selects the situations in which it will

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1. Jack Donnelly, *The Past, the Present, and the Future Prospects, in* INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ETHNIC CONFLICT 48 (Milton Esman & Shibley Telhami eds., 1995).

2. Lori F. Damrosch, *Changing Conceptions of Intervention, in* EMERGING NORMS OF JUSTIFIED INTERVENTION 91 (Laura W. Reed & Carl Kayson eds., 1993).

intervene. Within the UNSC, the relevance of the five permanent members has also increased. Although the United States theoretically wields no more power than the other permanent members, in practice it exercises substantially more influence through issue-linkages that exploit its trade advantages (e.g., with China), foreign aid (e.g., to Russia), and its role in European politics.

Thus far, this arrangement has resulted in a reasonable consensus within the United Nations, even when great reservations emerged about UNSC resolutions. For example, in the 1994 decision authorizing the use of force in Haiti, China chose to abstain rather than veto the resolution. For China, Haiti is a marginal issue, and although it is concerned about setting a precedent for intervention in the domestic affairs of other states, China, like all other permanent members, can ultimately veto any such resolution that applies to itself or to its allies. In short, the consensus is being maintained by avoiding issues which are of great importance to the permanent members of the UNSC and may lead to a conflict of interest. It is doubtful whether such an approach can be maintained for long. Even if it is maintained, this arrangement may generate resentment among other states. As recently as May 1995, the United States exercised its first veto in the post-Cold War era against a unanimous vote by the other fourteen members of the UNSC. In addition, a number of U.N. Member States believe that the UNSC, whose structure was created a half century ago, no longer reflects the new configuration of states.<sup>3</sup> Two of the wealthiest and most influential states, Germany and Japan, lack permanent seats, and a large number of new and old U.N. members feel that they are not adequately represented in the UNSC.

One can imagine how this structure could be improved in a way that would increase representation without undermining consensus. For example, "permanent" membership could be increased from five to ten members so as to include Japan, Germany, and three "rotating" members from the developing states. To increase the chance of consensus, a veto of any resolution would require at least two permanent members voting against it. This approach, like many others, can be implemented only if the UNSC, with its current structure, votes in favor of it, and it is unlikely given the selfish sovereign interests of the permanent members which weigh against such an idea. If Russia or China have been willing to cooperate with the United States on some issues with which they disagree, this agreement arises with the confidence that, on issues of vital interest to them, they alone can prevent U.N. action through their veto power. Why should they surrender this power? In short, it is unlikely that any permanent member of the UNSC will be willing to yield on this issue.

A more likely outcome is an increase in the "permanent" membership of the UNSC whereby the new members do not receive veto power. Germany and Japan have enough direct and indirect influence to secure per-

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3. Barry Blechman, *The Military Dimensions of Collective Security, in U.S. POLICY AND THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED NATIONS* 67 (Roger A. Coate ed., 1994).

manent seats without veto power; like the United States, they can use economic power for issue-linkage, and they can promise substantial increases in badly needed contributions to the United Nations. In revising the UNSC structure to include Germany and Japan, the Member States would necessarily include representatives from the developing world. Ultimately, however, such restructuring will not fundamentally alter the dominance of sovereign interests in shaping U.N. actions.

There are other important barriers to the establishment of an effective U.N. army in the foreseeable future: the absence of autonomous sources of income for the United Nations, which must often rely on ad hoc contributions that are difficult to collect;<sup>4</sup> what some have termed "a feudal bureaucracy;"<sup>5</sup> the absence of intelligence and other information gathering capabilities; and the weakness of existing logistical capabilities.

Proposals abound for correcting U.N. shortcomings. Realistically, however, one must consider only those options that do not so threaten the sovereignty norm that their implementation becomes impossible. Besides bureaucratic reform and incremental improvement in existing logistical and military capabilities, two proposals are noteworthy in this regard. One pertains to the attainment of autonomous revenue sources. U.N. peacekeeping and humanitarian operations could be partially funded by sources such as royalties on minerals extracted from deep seabeds or small charges on international communications and commerce. However, sovereignty could interfere with the implementation of this proposal. For example, it is likely that governments will be more responsive to domestic interest groups lobbying against such fees than to international agencies that do not directly elect these governments. Moreover, the difficulty in creating a mechanism to enforce collection could prove to be a serious obstacle to implementation.

The second proposal is to designate a portion of the national military forces of each state, appropriately trained, for use by the United Nations in humanitarian and peacekeeping operations authorized by the UNSC. As recent cases of U.N. action indicate, the current method of mobilizing multinational forces is highly problematic in that critical time is usually lost, and the troops ultimately deployed are often ill-trained for the mission. Although this proposal too will likely encounter opposition, the fact that individual states will have the ultimate say on the deployment of their own troops in any given case improves its chance for approval.<sup>6</sup>

## II. Beyond Capabilities: Barriers to U.N. Military Intervention

Limited resources certainly remain a serious barrier to the establishment of a standing U.N. army. Even the typical conservative scenario for a U.N.

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4. Donald Puchala, *Outsiders, Insiders, and UN Reform*, WASH. Q., Autumn 1994, at 161.

5. Raymond Hopkins, *Anomie, System Reform, and Challenges to the UN System*, in *INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ETHNIC CONFLICT* 72 (Milton Esman & Shibley Telhami eds., 1995).

6. Blechman, *supra* note 3, at 67.

force of no more than 10,000 troops<sup>7</sup> could require as many as 30,000 support staff.<sup>8</sup> However, even if the United Nations had all of the resources of a major superpower, it would still have serious difficulties intervening effectively for purposes of peace enforcement, especially in cases of ethnic conflict and civil strife.

Beyond resources, the difficulties facing effective U.N. military intervention emanate from the nature of the U.N. objectives themselves, and from the changing targets of U.N. intervention. It is useful to examine three relevant criteria in assessing these difficulties: the *nature of intervention*; the *spatial effectiveness of intervention*, i.e., the extent to which it succeeds not only in the specific case of intervention but also in affecting, through reputation and deterrence, other potential areas of trouble; and the *longitudinal effectiveness of intervention*, i.e., the extent to which the success provides a long-term solution to the problem faced.

#### A. The Nature of Intervention

Although discussions of U.N. intervention tend to focus on difficult and costly peace enforcement efforts which involve military force, there are many different types of intervention available to the United Nations, ranging from humanitarian relief to peace enforcement. When the United Nations and other international organizations (IOs) have engaged in peacekeeping, economic sanctions, humanitarian relief, and good offices, IOs have been relatively more effective than in cases of peace-enforcement and peacemaking. There are a number of reasons for the ineffectiveness of IO interventions in the latter cases.

#### B. Spatial Effectiveness of Intervention

It is useful to contrast modern U.N. interventions with the interventions by the superpowers during the Cold War. It is generally assumed that one of the major reasons for U.N. ineffectiveness is its limited military, economic, and logistical capabilities, in comparison with, for example, those of the United States. However, besides the limits imposed by the sovereignty norm, there is a fundamental structural problem that would make it difficult for the United Nations to intervene effectively even if all the resources of the United States were at its disposal: the United Nations is unable to project deterrence.

Even a dominant power like the United States lacks the ability to intervene in every trouble spot around the globe. When the United States intervened during the Cold War, it did so only selectively in places such as Korea and Vietnam where the local interests of the United States realistically did not warrant the costs of intervention. The idea was that effective actions in these cases would deter aggression against vital American inter-

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7. Capt. Gregory P. Harper, *Creating a U.N. Peace Enforcement Force: A Case for U.S. Leadership*, FLETCHER F. WORLD AFF., Winter/Spring 1994, at 49; Puchala, *supra* note 4, at 161.

8. Dick Kirschten, *Missions Impossible*, 25 NAT'L J. 2576 (1993).

ests elsewhere, thus justifying the costs of intervention. When deterrence worked (and there are many who argue that it did not), it was for two primary reasons: areas of "vital" American interests were clearly defined and limited, as were the targets of deterrence, namely the Soviet Union and its allies. However, the United States lacked the resources to intervene in *all* areas of vital interest; the logic of deterrence required effective intervention only when necessary, thereby making it too risky for the targets of deterrence to challenge interests elsewhere. Where intervention failed, such as in the 1982-83 U.S. intervention in Lebanon, the Reagan Administration learned that forces should be committed to military action overseas only when "vital" interests are at stake, and that such commitment should be made only with the clear intent and support needed to *win*.<sup>9</sup>

The potential for deterrence through U.N. intervention is much more limited. First, if the logical prerequisite of deterrence is the potential aggressor's fear of punishment, it is hard to know whom to punish in most cases of ethnic conflict, where the source of the conflict is either a collapse of central authority or a number of small internal aggressors. Second, since, in principle, the measure of relevance in any given case of conflict is not the vital interest of any single Member State but U.N. norms, all violations of these norms present potential cases of intervention. From this perspective, one cannot differentiate between civil strife in Sudan and civil strife in Northern Iraq. The result is a large set of potential targets of U.N. intervention, many of which require simultaneous responses, thus presenting the United Nations with an impossible task even with substantially enhanced resources. At the same time, *failure* to intervene in only a few of these cases undermines the very norm that the United Nations strives to establish.

When one adds the issue of sovereignty to this deterrence problem, additional complications emerge. The UNSC resolution authorizing intervention in Somalia, for example, included the finding of a "threat to international peace and security" at the insistence of China and some third world countries who were worried that intervention in Somalia might set a precedent for intervention in their own domestic politics. Similarly, when the United States attempted to mobilize the UNSC to authorize military intervention in Haiti in 1994, China and the Latin American states expressed concerns that action in Haiti might establish a threatening precedent. Consequently, the U.S. Ambassador explained to the United Nations that this case was "unique." In contrast, most third world countries supported U.N. action against Iraq following the latter's invasion of Kuwait, even though most perceived it as action precipitated by U.S. national interests. Furthermore, just as the Cold War was ending, it was unlikely that weaker states would acquiesce in permitting a strong state, Iraq, to invade its weak neighbor, Kuwait—particularly where the aggression was against the wishes of the United States, the most powerful nation

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9. RONALD REAGAN, AN AMERICAN LIFE (1990).

in the world. In short, sovereignty and calculations of state interest complicate the effectiveness of the United Nations.

Since enhanced resources alone cannot overcome the above structural barriers to effectiveness, there will be a growing need to set realistic priorities in the same way that effective states do. For example, serious violations of human rights, such as genocide, should be accorded substantial resources, in the same way that states accord resources to the defense of "vital" interests. Only by setting such priorities, even if limited in scope, can the United Nations become incrementally more effective; otherwise, the increasing disparity between the international expectations of the United Nations and its ability to meet those expectations will soon diminish the organization's influence.

### C. Longitudinal Effectiveness of Intervention

Intervention by international organizations is more likely to be effective in the short-term than to provide a long-term solution to a conflict. For example, although international efforts have provided humanitarian relief to the Kurds in northern Iraq, they have not solved their plight; while addressing the immediate problem of famine in Somalia, international intervention was unable to resolve the civil conflict that produced that famine. U.N. peacekeeping forces in Cyprus have succeeded in minimizing the violence between the conflicting groups but only through a long-term commitment of resources and without evidence that the conflict has come closer to resolution—perhaps even reducing the local parties' incentives to reach a lasting settlement. Part of the difficulty is that ethnic conflicts remain largely a national problem whose resolution depends upon subnational actors. The Kurds of Iraq will have to face the consequences of their conflict with the Iraqi state long after the international determination to provide them with help has diminished. Effective intervention by international organizations can take place only after achieving a fuller understanding of the internal dynamics of conflict.

Given the substantial resource constraints facing the United Nations as well as the escalating costs of intervention following the outbreak of hostilities in ethnic conflicts, international organizations should invest more resources in establishing effective mechanisms for early diplomatic intervention. Early warning systems could be set up, and small observer units could be dispatched to potential trouble spots in order to enable the United Nations to act in a preventive capacity, and to initiate good offices and mediation procedures while there is still time to preempt the outbreak of violence. Predicting imminent crises is very difficult, however, and while such measures are helpful, their limitations should be noted.

### III. Changing Means and Venues for International Intervention

In the absence of a standing U.N. army, how might international interventions in local conflicts be more effective? Because the U.N. is likely to continue to rely on national resources in major instances of intervention,

any assessment of the prospects of U.N. intervention must take into account calculations of national interest. States are not likely to commit substantial resources to resolve an international conflict, especially in the military arena, if important national interests are not at stake. In contrast, local parties to an ethnic conflict are generally willing to commit most of their resources to the conflict, because of its immediate importance. Thus, if an international intervention is to have any chance of success at all, it usually requires substantial external resources. The fact that only external actors with important interests are willing to pay the costs of intervention presents a serious dilemma for the United Nations.

The source of the dilemma is that "neutrality" is a critical asset when international organizations intervene in local conflict; the chance of failure increases when local actors perceive the interveners as being biased. As Hopkins illustrates, the potential effectiveness of the United Nations depends upon its universality.<sup>10</sup> Regional organizations, such as the Organization of African Unity (OAU) or the Arab League, are less effective because they are unable to remain neutral.

Yet, it is partial parties, whose interests are at stake in the conflict, that have the will and incentive to commit the resources required for intervention. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Syria and the Arab League took the lead in intervening in Lebanese strife, or that the United States mobilized large resources for oil-rich Kuwait. When intervention occurs in areas of no vital interest to the national interveners, as when the United States aided Somalia, commitment cannot be sustained. Those who expressed faith in the power of television depicting human suffering found that television is a double-edged sword: the blood of a single compatriot is far more powerful than a humanitarian cause. Moreover, with so much suffering around us, public sensitivity is easily dulled. It is likely that far more people followed the O.J. Simpson murder case in 1994 than paid attention to the horrifying tragedy in Rwanda.

One result of the end of the Cold War has been a substantial decline in incentives for the superpowers to intervene in ethnic conflict, at the same time that the opportunities for intervention have increased. The end of the Cold War both contributed to the outbreak of hostilities in Yugoslavia and reduced the incentives of the powerful states to intervene in that conflict. Because of Yugoslavia's strategic location near the heart of Europe, the United States, European states, and the U.S.S.R. would have been much more concerned about the consequences of the conflict during the Cold War. In short, despite increased public awareness of ethnic conflict globally, a diminishing number of states regard these conflicts as a high priority.

In most instances, states bordering on areas of ethnic conflict are the most affected by it: OAS states are more alarmed than others by events in Haiti; Europeans are more alarmed by events in Yugoslavia; and OAU states are more concerned about the tragedy in Rwanda. Consequently,

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10. Hopkins, *supra* note 5, at 72.

the United Nations increasingly empowers regional organizations (e.g., OAU in the case of Rwanda) and other multilateral groups (e.g., NATO in Bosnia; "a multilateral force under unified command and control" in Haiti) to intervene in problem areas. This trend is likely to continue.

Although such a trend means that interveners inevitably will be less "neutral" than some hope, it is nonetheless unavoidable given the resource constraints that the United Nations will likely continue to face. There are, however, ways to reduce the impact of the partiality of regional interveners. First, it is important to avoid unilateral interventions—the broader the regional organization, the better. Second, the United Nations should consolidate formal working relationships with regional organizations, as suggested by the Secretary-General. Third, regional organizations must be encouraged to upgrade their own structures to deal with the new tasks. Fourth, even when regional organizations intervene, such interventions should take place within the context of an authorizing resolution of the UNSC which spells out specific mandates.

Nevertheless, the role of the more powerful states, especially the United States, will remain indispensable in carrying out some operations in a timely fashion. Even in purely humanitarian cases, as providing relief to Rwandan refugees indicated, the logistical support for efficient and timely implementation requires the type of capability that few states other than the United States can provide.

## Conclusion

Given the assumption that only minor changes in the U.N. Security Council will take place in the foreseeable future and that only incremental improvements in the availability of U.N. resources will occur, I conclude that a standing U.N. army is neither possible nor desirable. As an alternative, the following modest steps could enhance U.N. effectiveness:

1. States should earmark some of their national forces for U.N. operations, while retaining veto power over the involvement of their own troops in any given operation.
2. The power of regional organizations must be enhanced, and their relations with the United Nations must be strengthened. Although regional organizations are less neutral than the United Nations might be, this option is an improvement over the current state of affairs.
3. Given serious resource limitations, the United Nations must establish priorities by focusing on feasible tasks; only then will the United Nations gain the confidence of the international community.

Although these steps will not fundamentally transform the United Nations, they are both possible and necessary for building a better, more effective United Nations.

## APPENDIX A

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