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# *The evolution of United Nations*

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## *peacekeeping*

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*The following is an edited text of the Cyril Foster\* lecture delivered by Marrack Goulding at the Examination Schools, Oxford University, on 4 March 1993. The text represents Marrack Goulding's views only, and in no way commits the United Nations or its Secretary-General. Mr Goulding ceased to be Under-Secretary-General for Peace-keeping Operations on 1 March 1993 before taking over the post of Under-Secretary-General for Political Affairs. The lecture was a personal valedictory statement.*

The title, 'The evolution of peacekeeping', was chosen about a year ago. At the time, it seemed to make sense; with the phasing out of the Cold War, the United Nations had been given new opportunities to help control and resolve conflicts. As a result, new tasks and new methods had evolved from what had previously been a fairly homogeneous activity. The biological metaphor seemed an accurate way of describing what was going on.

However, the word evolution implies a comparatively leisurely process in which, by trial and error, organisms develop more efficient ways of responding to a changing environment. A year later, the metaphor seems less apt. 1992 saw an almost five-fold increase in United Nations peacekeeping activity; we had some 11,000 military and police personnel deployed at the beginning of the year; by its end the total was over 52,000. Today 'the forced development of peacekeeping' might be a better title.

I propose first to analyse what peacekeeping had become by the time the Cold War ended; then to classify the different types (I would have referred to 'species' if the evolution metaphor was still appropriate) of peacekeeping operations which are currently deployed or being planned; then to discuss the current trend from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement and the implications it has for the United Nations ability to develop into an effective system of collective security; and finally to draw some brief conclusions about the heavy

\* Cyril Foster was a retired confectioner who, in 1956, left his estate to Oxford University with the request that it be used to enable 'a prominent and sincere speaker' to deliver once a year a lecture on the elimination of war and the better understanding of the nations of the world.

responsibilities which bear upon the Secretary-General and the Security Council.

### **What is peacekeeping?**

Peacekeeping is a technique which has been developed, mainly by the United Nations, to help control and resolve armed conflicts. There is no agreed definition of it nor even agreement on when the first peacekeeping operation was set up. Professor Alan James, in a carefully researched work published in 1990<sup>1</sup>, traces its origins back to the delimitation commissions which were established in the early 1920s to redraw a number of European frontiers after the First World War.

The official view in the United Nations is that the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) was the first United Nations peacekeeping operation. It consisted of unarmed military observers who were sent to Palestine in June 1948 to supervise a truce negotiated by Count Bernadotte in the first war between Israel and its Arab neighbours. It stayed on when, a month later, the Security Council, acting under Chapter VII of the Charter, 'ordered' a ceasefire. A similar group was deployed a few months later in Kashmir. A major step forward was taken when the first armed United Nations force—the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF)—was deployed in Egypt following the Anglo-French-Israeli attack on that country in October 1956.

The key role played by UNTSO in the difficult task of implementing the Arab–Israeli Armistice Agreements of 1949 and UNEF's success in defusing the Suez crisis led to further demands for the Organization's peacekeeping services.

The golden age—dare I say the *first* golden age?—of United Nations peacekeeping was from 1956 to 1974, though there was a hiatus for six years after the disaster that befell UNEF in 1967. Those 18 years gave birth to 10 of the 13 peacekeeping operations established before the revival of demand for peacekeeping in the late 1980s. On the whole they succeeded well in helping to control regional conflicts, especially in the Near East, at a time when the Cold War made it difficult for the Security Council to take effective action to resolve them.

The Congo operation (1960–64) deserves special mention. It is often described as a failure, but in fact it succeeded in its objectives, albeit at a very high cost, including the life of Dag Hammarskjöld and a major constitutional-cum-financial crisis at the United Nations. It is interesting in the contemporary context for three reasons. First, it was deployed in a country where the institutions of state were collapsing—the first case of what the Foreign Secretary recently called 'painting a country blue'. Second, it was the first peacekeeping operation to include very substantial civilian elements. Third, it was initially deployed as a peacekeeping operation; but when it became clear

<sup>1</sup> Alan James, *Peacekeeping in international politics* (London: Macmillan for International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1990).

## *The evolution of United Nations peacekeeping*

that the peacekeeping mode would not enable it to achieve its objectives, the Security Council authorized it to use force on a considerable scale to end the secession of Katanga—the first, and until Somalia the only, case of a transition from peacekeeping to peace-enforcement.

The Near East war of October 1973 gave rise to two other remarkable achievements: the interposition of the second United Nations Emergency Force between the Egyptian and Israeli armies in an exceedingly dangerous and complicated military situation; and, eight months later, the deployment of a United Nations force (UNDOF) to control an agreed buffer zone between Israeli and Syrian forces on the Golan Heights in Syria. That force is still there—unpublicized because it does its job so well.

After those two successes, the line went almost dead until in 1988 the new readiness of the United States and the Soviet Union to work together revived opportunities for resolving regional conflicts and created a renewed demand for peacekeeping.

During the intervening 14 years, only one new operation was set up—UNIFIL in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL also is interesting in the contemporary context. It is an operation about whose viability the then Secretary-General and his senior advisers had doubts. It was nevertheless pushed through the Security Council by the United States for pressing, if passing, political reasons: President Carter was launching the negotiations which were to lead to the Camp David Accords and did not want that process derailed by the Israeli invasion of Lebanon which had just taken place.

UNIFIL has not been able to carry out its mandate because it has never enjoyed the necessary cooperation from all the parties concerned. But its presence has brought succour to the people of southern Lebanon and its withdrawal would certainly lead to an intensification of hostilities. It has thus become a quasi-permanent fixture. It illustrates how much easier it is to get into a peacekeeping operation than to get out of it—and the need therefore for the Security Council to satisfy itself that conditions exist for successful peacekeeping before taking the decision to set up a new operation.

The 13 operations established during the Cold War (of which five remain in existence) fostered the gradual evolution of a body of principles, procedures and practices for peacekeeping. Few of them were formally enacted by the legislative organs of the United Nations. But they came to constitute a corpus of case law or customary practice which was by and large accepted by all concerned, though until the mid-1980s Moscow continued from time to time to grumble about peacekeeping's lack of legitimacy because it was not explicitly provided for in the Charter.

*The established principles of peacekeeping* can be summarized under five headings.

First, peacekeeping operations were *United Nations* operations. Their United Nationsness derived from various factors: they were established by one of the legislative organs of the United Nations (unlike the enforcement operations in

Korea or (subsequently) Kuwait and Somalia where the Security Council's role has been only to authorize certain member states to undertake military action for a specific purpose); they were under the command and control of the Secretary-General, who acted with authority delegated to him by the Security Council and reported regularly to the Council; and their costs were met collectively by the member states as 'expenses of the Organization' under Article 17 of the Charter—a principle which was established with much difficulty during the 1960s. It was this United Nationsness which had made United Nations peacekeeping operations acceptable to member states who would not otherwise have accepted foreign troops on their territory. Suspicions that peacekeepers were acting as instruments of their governments' policy, rather than of the collective will of the international community, could be fatal for the credibility of an operation. It had been learnt the hard way that it could also—literally—be fatal for the peacekeepers themselves.

Second, it had become established over time that peacekeeping operations could be set up only with the *consent of the parties to the conflict* in question. It had also been learnt that they could succeed only with the continuing consent and cooperation of those parties. This had turned out to be both a strength and a weakness.

It was a strength in that, for the parties, it made peacekeeping less threatening and more acceptable. For the troop-contributing countries, it reduced to a very low level the risk of combat casualties. It was supposed also, in theory, to improve the chances of success; the parties would have agreed in advance to what the peacekeepers were going to do.

In practice, the consent principle had sometimes turned out to be more of a weakness than a strength. Consent once given could later be withdrawn. President Nasser's withdrawal of Egypt's consent to the presence of UNEF I on Egyptian territory in May 1967 had been the classic example. It tragically illustrated the perennial truth that if one of the parties takes the decision to go to war there is very little that peacekeepers can do to prevent war. In other cases, cooperation promised was later reduced or withheld. This could be especially difficult for the peacekeepers when they found that they, not those who had broken their promises, were blamed for the resulting human suffering and/or humiliation of the United Nations.

Third, it had been established that the peacekeepers must be *impartial between the parties*. They were not there to advance the interests of one party against those of the other. It was not like Korea where the United States and its allies had been authorized by the Security Council to use force against North Korea for the benefit of South Korea. This principle of impartiality arose from the fact that peacekeeping operations were interim arrangements set up, as UNEF had been, without prejudice to the claims and positions of the parties.

Of course, the peacekeepers had to criticize, use pressure, mobilize international support, even in certain circumstances take more forceful action when a party violated agreed arrangements. But, beyond that, they could not take sides. Otherwise they themselves would violate the terms on which the

operation had been accepted by the parties. This requirement for absolute impartiality sometimes obliged peacekeepers to maintain normal relations with a party whose behaviour was being censured by most of the international community and thus exposed them to the charge of condoning that behaviour.

The fourth principle related to the *troops required for United Nations peacekeeping* operations. It was recognized that it would not be practicable for the United Nations to maintain a standing army. National armies and police forces could be the only source for the uniformed personnel the United Nations required. The Charter provided for member states to enter into binding agreements with the Security Council under which they would commit themselves to provide it with troops. There had been no agreement between the major powers on the conclusion of such agreements for peacekeeping operations—or indeed for peace enforcement. Successive Secretaries-General had perforce, therefore, to rely on member states to provide the necessary personnel and equipment on a voluntary basis. Member states had responded readily to the call.

The fifth principle concerned the *use of force*. More than half the organization's peacekeeping operations before 1988 had consisted only of unarmed military observers. But when operations were armed, it had become an established principle that they should use force only to the minimum extent necessary and that normally fire should be opened only in self-defence.

However, since 1973 self-defence had been deemed to include situations in which peacekeepers were being prevented by armed persons from fulfilling their mandate. This was a wide definition of 'self-defence'. In practice commanders in the field had only very rarely taken advantage of the authority to open fire on, for instance, soldiers at a roadblock who were denying passage to a United Nations convoy. This reluctance was based on sound calculations related to impartiality, to their reliance on the continued cooperation of the parties and to the fact that their force's level of armament was based on the assumption that the parties would comply with their commitments. The peacekeepers could perhaps win the firefight at that first roadblock. But, in lands of the vendetta, might they not find themselves out-gunned in the third or fourth encounter?

On the basis of these principles established during the first four decades of United Nations peacekeeping, a definition of peacekeeping could perhaps read as follows:

Field operations established by the United Nations, with the consent of the parties concerned, to help control and resolve conflicts between them, under United Nations command and control, at the expense collectively of the member states, and with military and other personnel and equipment provided voluntarily by them, acting impartially between the parties and using force to the minimum extent necessary.