

Peacekeeping Operations:
Preparing for US Participation

Brad Knopp
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Peacekeeping Operations: Preparing for US Participation

The collapse of the Soviet Union into its constituent republics and the ongoing crisis in Yugoslavia serve to remind that the post-Cold War world is neither stable nor secure. European security will remain uncertain until new regional security arrangements are worked out and until the new democratic states in the East develop stable internal structures and external relationships. Elsewhere, ethnic, religious, and territorial conflicts long held in check by the Cold War await resolution; that this process may be violent cannot be ruled out. Under these circumstances, the likelihood is high that peacekeeping forces may be found to be an appropriate response to containing or terminating hostilities and nurturing an environment in which a negotiated political resolution can be found. It is also nearly certain that the US will be asked to participate in such operations.

Peacekeeping operations bear little resemblance to conventional military operations: peacekeepers ultimately must depend on persuasion rather than force to achieve their goals. The peacekeeping force's maintenance of a reputation for impartiality is critical to the success of the operation. The issues that the US must consider prior to joining a peacekeeping mission are as critical as those considered prior to deploying any military force. Since the US has relatively little experience in peacekeeping

operations, Washington planners should now begin to think about the modalities for US participation in such a force. Indeed, contingency plans for conducting peacekeeping operations should be made. Planning now for the inevitable request for US participation will facilitate decision-making by highlighting the differences between conventional military and peacekeeping operations. It will help decision-makers identify critical issues which must be addressed if the operations are to succeed. Issues to be considered fall generally into two broad categories: when and under what circumstances the US can effectively participate in peacekeeping operations; and, whether US participation will contribute to the success of the operation.

When Should the US Participate in Peacekeeping Operations?

The question of whether and when the US should participate in peacekeeping operations is complex. Addressing the question will require the US to develop a policy for peacekeeping and to consider what peacekeeping operations can accomplish and whether US participation will further this process. The first question concerns the definition of the concept: "peacekeeping" is a term that means different things to different people. For example, the former Soviet Union "kept the peace" in Afghanistan, Washington termed operations in Grenada and Panama "peacekeeping" operations, and the Turks continue to describe their presence in Northern Cyprus as a peacekeeping force. In these contexts, the word

becomes politicized: one man's peacekeeping is another man's intervention. A less value-laden and probably more useful definition of the concept has been provided by the International Peace Academy (IPA):

the prevention, containment, moderation, and termination of hostilities between states (or forces) through the medium of a peaceful third party intervention organized and directed internationally using multinational forces of soldiers, police, and civilians to restore and maintain order.¹

This definition captures the range of objectives peacekeepers might be assigned to accomplish. It suggests that establishing a multinational structure manned by a variety of specialists to implement the plans will provide the greatest chance of success for the operation. The definition, which draws on lessons learned from numerous peacekeeping missions, would be a good beginning point of reference for US policymakers dealing with the issue. However, a critical consideration not fully communicated by this definition is that peacekeepers can achieve no results unless disputants empower the peacekeepers to do so. Additionally, peacekeepers' latitude for action may be severely limited by disagreements between/among the disputants over the scope of the peacekeeping mission. Thus, before the US agrees to participate in any peacekeeping operation, the mandate under which forces are to be deployed should be considered carefully.

The Mandate. The ultimate effectiveness of any peacekeeping

¹John MacKinley, The Peacekeepers (London: Unwin House, 1989 p. 199.

force rests on the quality of the political mandate under which it is deployed. The political arrangements under which peacekeepers deploy, especially the degree of commitment of the antagonists to a political solution, are the initial indicators whether the operations have any chance to succeed. The most effective mandate will specify limited goals which are achievable and which enjoy broad support from the parties to the conflict. A limited mandate which has little appeal to the adversaries can frustrate even the most qualified peacekeeping force. Given the criticality of the mandate, US policymakers must carefully consider elements which must be included in an agreement under which peacekeeping forces are to be deployed. In the event of a request for forces, US officials must determine whether the proffered mandate is sufficiently well-defined and has sufficient support among the parties involved.

A survey of past peacekeeping operations reveals that certain conditions must be inherent in the mandate under which peacekeeping forces operate. The UN has codified these prerequisites into principles of peacekeeping which resemble former Secretary of Defense Weinberger's tests for deploying US military forces. Developed as operating procedures for UN forces which deployed to the Suez in 1973, the principles succinctly summarize factors critical to peacekeeping success:

1. Deploy only with the full confidence and backing of the Security Council; and
2. Deploy only with the full cooperation and assent of the host countries.

Once deployed, force is to:

3. be under the command of the United Nations through the Secretary General;
4. enjoy complete freedom of movement throughout the country;
5. be international in composition, comprising contingents from nations acceptable to the host government;
6. act impartially;
7. use force only in self defence;
8. be supplied and administered under UN arrangements.²

Although these conditions were laid down specifically for UN-administered forces, contributors to peacekeeping forces, particularly the US, should carefully consider each of the requirements to ascertain that all are covered in the mandate.

The parties to the mandate, particularly the organization under whose aegis the agreement has been developed, must also be carefully scrutinized by Washington before committing forces. The UN is most closely associated with the concept of peacekeeping but it need not be the only organization to turn to for such leadership. The UN's response to the recent Gulf crisis is instructive in this regard: unusually strong UN actions significantly increased the credibility and prestige of the organization and markedly enhanced the influence it enjoys in the post-Cold War world. Regional organizations, such as the EC or the Organization of American States, might also be appropriate for peacekeeping activities. In fact, use of regional organizations

²The Peacekeepers, p. 4.

might enhance them politically and contribute to regional and international stability, continuing goals of US foreign policy.

Domestic Support

Participation in peacekeeping operations puts Washington's reputation on the line both internationally and domestically. While international support is a prerequisite for participation, domestic support cannot be overlooked. At a minimum, Congressional support, and probably endorsement, must be sought. Failure to obtain Congressional support could endanger funding of the operations, especially over the longer term. This will be especially critical should long-term US force deployments be required and if any personnel casualties are incurred. A strategy for providing the media access to peacekeeping operations should also be developed to help build public support for the peacekeeping operations.

Military Considerations

Resolution of the most critical political issues does not solve the policy question for US decisionmakers. Military considerations must also play a role in any US decision to join a peacekeeping operation. First and foremost, US planners, policymakers, and military forces assigned to the task must realize that peacekeeping is more a political than a military art.

Military personnel are trained and schooled in the use of force rather than persuasion, and politicians, soldiers, and commanders must recognize the special characteristics of their peacekeeping role. Rather than interpreting the situation so that it seems to fit in with a conventional combat approach, peacekeeping duties require that commanders and soldiers alter their behavior and attitudes to meet the needs of peacekeeping.³ These special, unfamiliar military requirements will necessitate careful study of decisions concerning the types of forces to be deployed and command and control arrangements to be employed.

US planners must carefully consider the types of forces to be deployed for peacekeeping duties. The mix of US forces will be determined by local circumstances and the expected operational environment. Plans for sustaining the forces and for security and communications must also be considered. The issue of the required capability of the deploying forces may be the most difficult: if peacekeepers use persuasion rather than force, are front line troops really needed? This is an extremely delicate issue. The ability to use force may be critical at the onset of a peacekeeping mission when tensions between the adversaries remains high. Military strength and effectiveness may also contribute in important ways to establishing credibility. Once hostilities have been contained, however, the ability to use force may be far less critical than the ability to create an environment conducive to

³The Peacekeepers, p. 16.

negotiations to settle the outstanding issues.

An exceptionally important issue for US military and political officials concerns command and control of forces deployed for peacekeeping purposes. The issue is simple if only US forces are involved and US personnel command the force. However, experience has shown that, in most cases, integrated, multilateral forces, rather than national forces, are better suited to peacekeeping functions. Integrated forces have the advantage of the appearance of impartiality, although they are difficult to field and command because of language and cultural differences and the absence of common operating procedures. National forces would be more effective militarily but vulnerable to charges of impartiality.

Problems associated with fielding and commanding a multilateral force are not insurmountable, as UN experience has shown. Dividing the territory into national zones minimizes many operational problems. The remaining issues could be dealt with through effective liaison. Including countries with considerable experience in peacekeeping (Finland, Canada, Austria) could also minimize start-up problems. Over the longer term, the US might consider supporting creation of a standing peacekeeping force under UN auspices, which would be responsible for developing doctrine and tactics and providing training for forces to be deployed in a peacekeeping role. For the US, command of the force is clearly the most sensitive issue, politically and militarily. By contributing

forces to a multinational group responsible to an international organization, influence over day-to-day operations and over the direction of the peacekeeping mission is diluted. The US may have to be prepared to accept these limitations, however, since to increase unilateral US influence might threaten to politicize the operation.

Can the US be a credible peacekeeper?

The command and control issue raises a more fundamental question for policymakers pondering whether US forces can participate in peacekeeping operations: will the US be viewed as sufficiently impartial to serve as a credible arbiter in any dispute? The maintenance of a reputation for impartiality is absolutely vital to the success of a peacekeeping mission. Loss of this reputation can lead quickly to the failure of the effort. The US experience of the MNF in Beirut is a bitter reminder of this lesson.

Washington's ability to serve as an impartial peacekeeper must be viewed in an historical context and be understood from the perspective of the country hosting the peacekeeping force. During the Cold War, direct involvement by the superpowers in peacekeeping operations was generally avoided. Such involvement would have given an East-West dimension to the issue and jeopardized the peacekeeping effort. In the post-Cold War era, other perceptions

can hamper US involvement. In some parts of the world, the US, along with France and the UK, are viewed as colonial powers with vested interests in the outcomes of conflicts and thus unsuitable for serving as arbitrators. Latin American perceptions of the US exemplify this problem: questions about Washington's motives would make it difficult for the US to serve usefully there. In the Middle East, US relations with Israel cast doubt on Washington's ability to serve without prejudice. These perceptions do not rule out US involvement; it merely makes Washington's job more difficult.

More generally, Washington's position as the sole superpower in the post-Cold War world may create other problems for US participation in peacekeeping operations. So long as the US is perceived as the most influential player in the international arena, the parties to any dispute might believe that the quickest, most satisfying resolution to the conflict is US endorsement of their cause. These conflicting demands will present US policymakers with difficult decisions: the US may find it politically and conceptually appealing to endorse one of the parties to a conflict -- particularly if such endorsement advances US interests. However, such a policy might not contribute to termination of hostilities and restoration of peace. The example of Yugoslavia comes to mind, ~~as an example~~.

Given the number of complications the US might face in joining

peacekeeping operations, Washington policymakers might carefully consider whether US support for a peacekeeping mission is a sufficient substitute for US participation. At a minimum, it appears that US support will be necessary purely for financial reasons. Moreover, within the UN framework, US political support will be necessary to achieve Security Council approval. US support for operations outside the UN framework is more uncertain in effect. The Yugoslav example is instructive: US expressions of support for European Community peacekeeping efforts there was not effective in containing/terminating hostilities. Conversely, so long as the international community looks to Washington for leadership on major issues, the absence of US support could prolong hostilities.