

NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY
NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL MILITARY STAFF COMMITTEE:

RELIC OR REVIVAL?

ADVANCED STUDY ESSAY

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The absence of unanimity among the Great Powers on collective security arrangements, present world tensions, acts of localized aggression, and guerilla activity in areas of instability make it entirely unrealistic for the United Nations to attempt to pin its hopes on advance pledges of specific forces.¹

Recent developments have convinced us of the need to return to the original idea conceived by the founders of this organization and of its charter....During the Cold War, the committee could not and did not have a role to play. Now, however, we see that without substantive recommendations from this body the Security Council is unable to carry out its functions under the Charter....[It] should begin by initiating steps to reactivate the work of the Military Staff Committee and study the practical aspects of assigning national military contingents to serve under the authority of the Council.²

INTRODUCTION

The above contrasting views exemplify the dichotomy of opinions concerning the creation of a United Nations (UN) standing military force to deter and, when required, combat international aggression under the terms of Article 43 of the UN Charter. The prime vehicle for coordination of this on-call military force, created under Article 47, was to be the Military Staff Committee (MSC) of the UN Security Council. Put to sleep while still in its infancy as a relic of the early days of the Cold War, the MSC is now in its fourth decade of dormancy following its premature demise. Recent signs, however, indicate that the end of the Cold War may have created an opportunity in which an expanded role for the MSC, or something similar in function, may now be possible.

¹Colonel A.G. Katzin, "Collective Security: The Work of the Collective Measures Committee," in Annual Review of United Nations Affairs, 1952, p.207.

²"Shevardnadze-45th General Assembly Session," News Release, Press Office of the USSR Embassy in Canada, No. 57, 27 September 1990.

Increased global participation and popular support for UN peacekeeping operations, coupled with an activist Secretary-General, could lead to a revival of the MSC in a manner similar to that originally proposed by the framers of the Charter.

CREATION OF THE UN MILITARY STAFF COMMITTEE

As World War II ground toward its conclusion, post-war planners drew upon the concepts of the failed League of Nations experience in their efforts to develop a new international organization which would guarantee that there would be no more "wars to end all wars". Principal among the lessons learned was that the new body should have the ability to enforce its sanctions, decisions and measures against aggression. Collective security, provided by the armed forces of the Permanent Members, would serve to enforce these measures to preserve the peace or take action required against potential aggressors.³

Three options were initially considered in determining the nature of this potential UN military organization: an ad hoc coalition of forces developed as required, a permanent force under UN control, or a pool of national forces upon which the UN could quickly call.⁴ The ad hoc force was rejected due to its similarity to the failed League model and the standing UN force was eliminated because of its suggestion of a world government structure. Thus was born the concept of national "on-call"

³Goldman, Ralph M. "Is It Time To Revive The UN Military Staff Committee?", California State University, Los Angeles: 1990, p.3.

⁴Boulden, Jane. Prometheus Unborn: The History of the Military Staff Committee, Canadian Center for Global Security, Ottawa: 1993, p.2.

contingency forces to be requested for use by the UN as necessary.

To assist the Security Council with respect to technical guidance and advice concerning this UN military force, a Security and Armaments Commission (SAC) was created as the draft predecessor of the MSC. Its proposed staffing by international civil servants eventually gave way to the recognition of expertise which could only come from military representatives of the great powers.⁵ At the Dumbarton Oaks and San Francisco Conferences, this commission became known as the MSC during the negotiations concerning its composition. Two alternative proposals were considered: the British suggested that membership on the MSC be limited to Permanent Members only while a Soviet proposal opened the MSC to all Security Council members. Although the British proposal finally prevailed, an eventual amendment resulted in a provision for the establishment of MSC subcommittees (with Security Council permission) to allow for regional representation.⁶ Subsequent affirmation of these principles resulted in the adoption of language which would ultimately become Articles 43 through 47 of the UN Charter.

Specifically, Article 43 requires that all members:

make available to the Security Council, on its call....
armed forces, assistance and facilities, including rights of
passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining
international peace and security.⁷

Article 47 formally established a Military Staff Committee:

to advise and assist the Security Council on all

⁵Boulden, p.2.

⁶Boulden, p. 2.

⁷UN Charter.

questions relating to the [its] military requirements....the employment and command of forces placed at its disposal, the regulation of armaments, and possible disarmament. [It] shall consist of the Chiefs of Staff of the permanent members of the Security Council or their representatives.⁸

MILITARY STAFF COMMITTEE DELIBERATIONS

The MSC first convened in London on February 4, 1946 at Security Council request. Its task was to examine the military implications of Article 43 regarding the special agreements under which member nations would place national armed forces at the "strategic direction" of the MSC.⁹ Accordingly, an MSC Subcommittee on Basic Principles was formed to solicit, review and consolidate perspectives on Article 43 agreements by the next MSC meeting. Although the United States, France, Britain and China all submitted their position papers on time, the Soviet Union did not do so. This served as a harbinger of problems to come.¹⁰

Over the following six months, the continued Soviet unwillingness to provide a statement of basic principles became an issue of concern and contentious debate, and eventually prompted the Security Council to establish a deadline for the MSC final report to overcome the slow pace of deliberations. This action reflected the widespread belief that the Article 43 agreements were pivotal to public confidence in the fledgling UN organization, as well as to post-war disarmament progress in general.¹¹

⁸UN Charter.

⁹Goldman, p.7.

¹⁰Boulden, p.3.

¹¹Boulden, p.4.

MSC REPORT ON GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The MSC report, "General Principles Governing the Organization of the Armed Forces Made Available to the Security Council by Member Nations of the United Nations", was submitted on April 30, 1947. The report consisted of ten chapters comprising forty-one articles.¹² Although agreement was reached on twenty-five of the articles, the MSC failed to agree on sixteen critical issues. Two annexes, longer than the report itself, were attached in explanation of the areas of disagreement.¹³

Areas of Agreement

Article 1 of the report expressed the consensus of the MSC with respect to the general purpose of the UN armed forces: restoration of international peace and security in cases of threats to peace, breaches of peace or any act of aggression.¹⁴

In terms of the composition of armed forces, Articles 3 and 4 dictated that the units should come from the normally maintained, but best-equipped, national land, air and sea forces available from member nations.¹⁵ While this was interpreted to mean that the bulk of peacekeeping forces would come from the Permanent Members of the Security Council, an atmosphere of mutual distrust between the United States and USSR soon eliminated the superpowers as major contributors. In practice, the peacekeeping forces over

¹²"Report of the Military Staff Committee", UN Security Council Official Records, Second Year, Special Supplement No. 1, New York: 1947.

¹³Boulden, p.4.

¹⁴MSC Report, p. 1.

¹⁵MSC Report, p. 1.

time were selected from smaller, more neutral countries.¹⁶

With respect to the overall strength of the armed forces, Article 5 of the MSC Report noted that the "moral weight and potential power" of UN forces would be very great, and thus would directly influence the size of the forces required, perhaps implying smaller numbers than previously estimated.¹⁷ Article 7, accepted conditionally by the USSR, stated that decisions on overall strength would simply be made by the Security Council, with assistance from the MSC.¹⁸

In similar fashion, the MSC reached consensus that states should not be compelled to increase their armed forces to compensate for the on-call contingent force required to support the UN and that states which were unable to provide forces could contribute facilities or other assistance (Articles 13-15).¹⁹

Further areas of agreement included the requirement to maintain contingent forces at a degree of readiness which would support combat introduction within a time frame mutually agreed upon (Articles 22-24), and the necessity to provide national forces with supplies, replacements of personnel and equipment (Article 29) as well as to maintain sufficient reserves of each (Article 30).²⁰

Addressing the controversial issue of command and control,

¹⁶Goldman, p. 7.

¹⁷MSC Report, p. 1.

¹⁸MSC Report, p. 2.

¹⁹Boulden, p. 5.

²⁰MSC Report, p. 4-6.

the MSC Report recommended that the armed forces remain under national command until such time as they were required by the UN. When needed, they would shift operational control to the UN Security Council, and be directed by the MSC. At that time, national units would remain intact, commanded by national commanders under the strategic guidance of the MSC, subject at all times to national regulations and discipline. Commanders would be entitled to communicate directly with their national authorities at all times (Articles 36-40).²¹

Areas of Disagreement

The major obstacles to agreement before the MSC included the size, location (basing), rights of passage, assistance and timing of withdrawal of UN military forces. While a detailed analysis of each of these issues is not possible in this paper, it is necessary to revisit the major themes as a starting point for discussions regarding a revitalized MSC role in the future.

The most significant area of disagreement concerned the contributions of forces to be committed to UN authority. The Soviet position called for absolute equality of contributions - man for man and plane for plane - based on the principle of equality of status of the Perm Five. The other four permanent members argued for more efficient "comparable" contributions which would account for variations in force structure and distribution within contributing nations.²²

Additionally, the overall size of the recommended force

²¹MSC Report, p. 8.

²²Boulden, p. 7.

varied from the Soviet preference for a smaller force (125,000 men/600 bombers/300 fighters/30 ships) shared by Britain, France and China to a larger force (300,000 men/1250 bombers/2250 fighters/3 battleships/6 carriers/100 ships/90 submarines) proposed by the United States.²³ By either estimate, these represent extraordinary figures in terms of today's force structures.

On the issue of establishing international military bases, the MSC again split in opinion, with the majority favoring the use of member military bases by UN peacekeeping forces when necessary. The Soviet Union dissented, holding that bases were not included in the facilities and assistance provision of Article 43 of the UN Charter and arguing that such a proposal would represent a breach of national sovereignty.²⁴ Likewise, there was no agreement on guaranteed rights of passage for the UN force, which could be negotiated on a case basis.

The issues of location of the contingent forces pending call-up and the timing of their withdrawal upon completion of their UN assignment proved contentious to the degree that eventual agreement was not possible within the time frame allocated for the final MSC report. China, Britain and the United States supported stationing the national forces, when not in use, "at the discretion of Member Nations in any territories or waters to which they have legal access", while France broadened the provision to include trusteeship territories, and the USSR argued for a

²³Goldman, p. 8.

²⁴Goldman, p. 9.

stricter interpretation limiting the forces to national territory only.²⁵ Regarding timing of withdrawal upon completion of a UN assignment, the Soviets proposed a specific limit of 30-90 days while the other members desired a less rigid limit of "as soon as possible".²⁶

DEMISE OF THE MILITARY STAFF COMMITTEE

As might be expected, the MSC Report was received by the Security Council amid considerable debate. However, despite a strong desire to resolve differences of opinion among the victors of World War II, the emerging Cold War politics of mistrust, intimidation and confrontation combined to make the MSC one of its earliest victims. Following a July 1947 discussion on the MSC Report, the Security Council would never again debate the MSC and its Article 43 issues. Although it continued to hold formal meetings fortnightly, sometimes in full military attire and occasionally followed by dinner or a reception, the MSC has yet to discuss issues of substance.²⁷

In the interim, several new approaches were developed to address the control or direction of contingent UN forces.

During the Korean hostilities, UN military forces were introduced as a "police action" in support of South Korea without specifically invoking Article 42 or 43, and facilitated by the Soviet boycott of Security Council meetings. The MSC continued to meet regularly but was not called upon in any sense to provide an

²⁵MSC Report, p.7.

²⁶Goldman, p. 9.

²⁷Goldman, p. 15.

advisory function or strategic direction to the UN armed force.²⁸

Upon the return of the USSR to the Security Council in August 1950, the General Assembly adopted a parallel peacekeeping structure, under the Uniting For Peace Resolution, which would circumvent the possibility of a future Security Council peacekeeping veto. Under this resolution, the Secretary-General appointed a panel of military experts to provide technical guidance and expertise to the contingent forces provided to UN operations. This Collective Measures Committee (CMC) was intended to become a working alternative to the ill-fated MSC.²⁹

Shortly after the election of Dag Hammarskjold as Secretary-General in 1953, the UN Security Council transitioned to ad hoc peacekeeping operations. Later, as a result of the Suez Crisis in 1956, an Office of the Military Adviser to the Secretary-General was created. The primary function of this office was to assist in UN emergency force field operations planning and, thus, it became the logical successor to both the MSC and CMC.³⁰

Proposals to revive the MSC and Article 43 were floated throughout the Cold War period, most notably in 1965 and 1972 as a result of Soviet initiatives to the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations (SCOPK). An initially lukewarm United States response began to change during the thaw in superpower relations brought about during the Gorbachev era. As the Cold War ended and UN legitimacy was restored largely as a result of the

²⁸Boulden, p. 13.

²⁹Goldman, p.11.

³⁰Goldman, p.11.

success of the Gulf War UN coalition, it became possible once more to seriously consider reviving the dormant MSC.

Indeed, in his 1992 "Agenda For Peace" blueprint for strengthening the UN capability for preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali advocated:

that the Security Council initiate negotiations in accordance with Article 43, supported by the Military Staff Committee....It is my view that the role of the [MSC] should be seen in the context of Chapter VII, and not that of the planning or conduct of peacekeeping operations.³¹

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The current environment for UN peacekeeping operations may be fertile for a revival of the MSC with new and enhanced authority and, perhaps, expanded membership. In the context of modern UN military missions which go beyond the traditional peacekeeping mandate, an updated MSC may be invaluable in performing numerous functions related to, and including, strategic guidance to UN military forces. Already, a number of actions are being taken to facilitate command and control improvements, the military staff has been expanded, a special task force is seeking the pre-designation of contingent military forces to ensure rapid deployment, and a 24-hour-per-day operations center has been opened.³² The following recommendations are therefore intended to explore these new potential unconventional roles for the MSC in addition to the keystone Chapter VII enforcement function.

A critical area of contribution for a revitalized MSC would

³¹An Agenda For Peace, UN Secretary-General, 17 June 1992, Article 43.

³²Boulden, p. v.

be the military interpretation of Security Council mandates for specific UN operations, ranging from peacekeeping to peacemaking to peace-enforcement and others. The MSC would act to monitor the progress of the operation to ensure the mandate is being met, and, in general, act as liaison between the military operational commander and the Security Council and the Secretary-General when the Security Council directs his involvement.³³

Similarly, the MSC could monitor the imposition of sanctions against a member state, when imposed. Regardless of the perceived effectiveness of this diplomatic and economic tool, the likelihood of its enhanced effectiveness over time would be increased by full-time monitoring by an agency with military experience and access to intelligence.³⁴

In the area of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), the MSC role could be substantive; its membership includes the five major nuclear states. Seriously considered for an armaments regulation role in 1947, the MSC could assist the Security Council in monitoring the worldwide proliferation regime, conducting liaison with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and coordinating military intelligence in support of monitoring arms control treaty compliance.³⁵ Additionally, it could provide personnel to staff armament negotiations or supervise conventional arms notification and licensing systems by maintaining public records of weapon transfers, tests and

³³Boulden, p. 28.

³⁴Boulden, p. 28.

³⁵Boulden, p. 29.

nonmilitary explosions.³⁶ Conceivably, the MSC could also be used as an institution to supervise weapons technology research activity.

The coordination of international military anti-terrorist operations is another function for which the MSC is also well-suited. Likewise, it could potentially serve as a center for coordination of global military anti-drug operations. Both of these roles would meld well with the intelligence gathering and monitoring functions discussed earlier.

Lastly, it has been suggested that the MSC could serve as a central repository of military information to provide resources and technical knowledge which military academies, libraries and professional research activities could access. Examples for MSC functions of this type would include the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) and the International Peace Academy (IPA).³⁷ Thus postured, the MSC could establish international military standards for future UN military operations in communications, training, logistics, operational doctrine, rules of engagement, and equipment inter-operability, among many others.³⁸

Before the MSC can be resuscitated, however, many complex procedural and administrative issues must be resolved, with multinational representation in the context of a global security system. Using the Final MSC Report as a point of departure, it

³⁶Goldman, p.22.

³⁷Goldman, p. 23.

³⁸Durch, William J. "The United Nations and Collective Security in the 21st Century", U.S. Army War College Fourth Annual Conference on Strategy, February 1993, p. 26.

may now be possible to reach greater consensus on key issues, especially absent Soviet expansionism which doomed Article 43. A new era of cooperation among the Permanent Members of the Security Council could breathe life into this Cold War relic and imbue in it roles and functions which far surpass, but complement, those originally envisioned by the framers of the UN Charter.

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