

Heritage Lectures

No. 1041

Delivered June 13, 2007



Published by The Heritage Foundation

August 28, 2007

The United States Must Demand Accountability From U.N. Peacekeeping Operations

Steven Groves

With southern Lebanon in the near past and Darfur looming ahead, the issues relating to the utility and proper role of U.N. peacekeeping operations are certainly ripe for debate.

“Force Multipliers” and U.S. National Interests

At the outset, the term “force multiplier” should be dispensed with when assessing U.N. peacekeeping capabilities. “Force multiplier” is a military term defined as a capability that, when added to and employed by a combat force, significantly increases the combat potential of that force and thus enhances the probability of success. Force multipliers can be a technologically advanced weapons system, or simply holding the “high ground” during a military engagement.

The key term within the definition of force multiplier, however, is *combat*, which is why U.N. peacekeepers are not now—and will not for the foreseeable future be—a force multiplier for U.S. armed forces. U.N. peacekeepers have not shown the ability to reliably and adequately support U.S. operations in today’s combat environment.

Part of the reason U.N. peacekeepers cannot qualify as force multipliers is that they usually operate under an unclear or insufficient use of force mandate. Inadequate use of force mandates have had disastrous consequences in the past, such as the decision by U.N. forces to stand down in the face of atrocities and massacres in Rwanda in 1994 and Srebrenica in 1995. U.N. peacekeepers that, for whatever reason, have

Talking Points

- Although U.N. peacekeeping missions may, in certain limited circumstances, align with the national interests of the United States, it is premature to discuss whether U.S. taxpayer dollars should be used to pay “arrears” allegedly owed to the U.N.
- The status quo of U.N. peacekeeping operations—including widespread sexual abuse by U.N. peacekeeping forces—is unacceptable and must be addressed prior to further U.S. commitments to peacekeeping missions.
- The United States cannot be seen as the underwriter of sexual abuse in the world’s most desperate, war-torn nations.
- The U.N. should amend Status of Forces Agreements that are entered into by the U.N. and member states that contribute peacekeeping personnel to require prosecutions of peacekeepers who commit crimes during a peacekeeping mission.

This paper, in its entirety, can be found at:
www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/hl1041.cfm

Produced by The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom

Published by The Heritage Foundation
214 Massachusetts Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20002-4999
(202) 546-4400 • heritage.org

Nothing written here is to be construed as necessarily reflecting the views of The Heritage Foundation or as an attempt to aid or hinder the passage of any bill before Congress.

failed to defend themselves have been taken as hostages by hostile forces, as occurred in Sarajevo in 1995 and Sierra Leone in 2000. When U.S. forces most needed the assistance of U.N. troops—in Somalia in 1993—their performance was less than stellar by most accounts. These incidents do not inspire much confidence in U.N. peacekeeping capabilities.

That being said, U.S. administrations have often relied upon U.N. peacekeepers to serve certain limited purposes around the world where the United States has interests, but has declined to intervene with its own armed forces. If the U.N. peacekeepers qualify as a force multiplier, it is under those circumstances. In sum, U.N. peacekeeping forces are not a “force multiplier” unless you define that phrase broadly enough to include any instance that U.N. peacekeeping forces would be utilized instead of U.S. forces, which could in turn be deployed elsewhere in the world.

In the final equation, the debate over the utility of U.N. peacekeepers does not turn on semantics. The real question to be answered is not whether U.N. peacekeepers could possibly be a “force multiplier” for U.S. armed forces, but rather whether and under what circumstances U.N. peacekeeping serves the vital national interests of the United States.

What does or does not qualify as a vital national interest of the United States is a subject of debate among experts in international relations and military affairs. What qualifies as a vital national interest of the United States in the post-9/11 world may not have qualified in the pre-9/11 world, and vice versa. Suffice it to say that the United States has benefited from the placement of U.N. forces in locations where the world may have otherwise called for U.S. military intervention, which has in turn allowed U.S. forces to deploy elsewhere in the world where our vital national interests are actually at stake.

The Status Quo is Unacceptable

But the analysis does not end there. Merely because in some limited circumstances U.N. peacekeeping serves U.S. interests, it does not necessarily follow that American taxpayers should be called upon to shoulder an increase in the level of U.S. contributions to U.N. peacekeeping operations, or

that they should pay any peacekeeping “arrearages” allegedly owed. That conclusion assumes that the status quo of U.N. peacekeeping operations is acceptable.

There are many problems with the current state of U.N. peacekeeping operations, all well documented in reports such as those issued by the U.S. Government Accountability Office and the U.N. Office of Internal Oversight Services. The U.N. peacekeeping program has more than quadrupled in size since 1999 without a commensurate strengthening of its internal control mechanisms. An internal U.N. audit of \$1 billion worth of peacekeeping procurement contracts found that at least \$265 million of those expenditures was subject to waste, fraud, or abuse.

Yet all other problems relating to peacekeeping operations pale in comparison to the main reason for not accepting the status quo—the persistence of sexual exploitation perpetrated by U.N. peacekeepers. The many instances of sexual exploitation are well known and need not be described in detail here, but suffice it to say that the irony of those abuses should be lost on nobody. The fact that U.N. peacekeepers—who have been sent to protect the most destitute and desperate populations on earth—should use their position of power to sexually exploit those who have already been victimized by their circumstances is beyond comprehension.

U.N. peacekeepers must be held accountable for their criminal acts if the U.N. is to be viewed as a force for peace and security around the world. In the past, peacekeepers who have been credibly accused of sexual misconduct or other crimes have, at worst, simply been repatriated to their home countries where they face no punishment. This is apparently all the U.N. is empowered to do. The results are sadly predictable. An analysis done by the U.K. *Independent* newspaper in January found that while nearly 200 U.N. personnel have been repatriated for sex offenses over the past three years, none appear to have been prosecuted by their home countries.

Necessary Reforms

That is simply unacceptable. At a minimum, any member state that contributes troops or personnel to a peacekeeping mission should be required to coop-

erate with investigations into abuse or misconduct leveled against those personnel. Such investigations may be carried out by local law enforcement within the nation where the alleged crime occurred, or if the capacity there is lacking, by U.N. authorities.

To combat sexual exploitation, the U.N. should implement mandatory uniform standards of conduct for military and civilian peacekeeping personnel participating in U.N. missions. It is not enough (as is currently being proposed) to merely amend the existing “peacekeeper’s pocket guide,” which has clearly been ignored by offending peacekeepers for many years.

Rather than amend the pocket guide, the U.N. should amend the so-called Status of Forces Agreements that are entered into by and between the U.N. and each member state that contributes peacekeeping personnel to U.N. missions. Status of Forces Agreements memorialize the terms and conditions of the troop commitment. While these Agreements generally place the responsibility upon the troop-contributing countries to prosecute their own personnel for crimes committed during the peacekeeping mission, there are no enforcement mechanisms available to the U.N. to monitor that provision. Indeed, prosecutions for crimes committed by peacekeeping personnel when they return to their home countries are few and far between.

The U.N. must require that member states commit in their respective Status of Forces Agreements to investigate, try, and punish their personnel when credible evidence of wrongdoing exists. The Agreements should require member states to report to the U.N. on the status of prosecutions of personnel against whom credible allegations of misconduct were made. The member states must also commit to inform the U.N. of the outcome of such prosecutions. States that fail to fulfill those commitments

should be barred from providing troops for peacekeeping operations. In addition, the U.N. must maintain a database of the names of all peacekeeping personnel who have been accused, charged, or convicted of crimes committed while employed in a peacekeeping mission so that these troops are not permitted to participate in future peacekeeping operations.

These new requirements will not guarantee that peacekeepers will not abuse local populations, but should give strong incentives to contributing member states to take action against offenders, which is something they apparently have little interest in doing under the status quo.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is premature to discuss whether and under what circumstances U.N. peacekeeping could serve as a “force multiplier” for U.S. armed forces or even whether peacekeepers could complement the vital national interests of the United States. It is certainly premature to discuss whether U.S. taxpayer dollars should be used to increase our contributions to peacekeeping activities or pay alleged “arrearages.” The United States cannot be seen as the underwriter of sexual abuse in the world’s most desperate, war-torn nations. Only after the U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations has been reformed in such a manner that it may perform its important duties at the highest level of professionalism should those matters be addressed.

—Steven Groves is *Bernard and Barbara Lomas Fellow* in *The Margaret Thatcher Center for Freedom* at *The Heritage Foundation*. These remarks were delivered June 13, 2007, before the *U.S. House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight*.