

CHALLENGES OF CHANGE: THE NATURE OF PEACE OPERATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY AND CONTINUING NEED FOR REFORM

Jacques Paul Klein
Special Representative of the Secretary General and
Coordinator of the United Nations Operations in Liberia

There is an old maxim in peacekeeping – before you ask a wise man, ask someone who has done it. I am pleased to see here this morning so many people who have done it.

It is a great pleasure to address this important conference. I would like to thank the organizers for giving me the opportunity to discuss my views of the challenges and future of United Nations peacekeeping. My basic standpoint may be simply stated. UN peacekeeping, which was out of fashion for a period, is now back. The UN has a unique legal and moral authority as well as valuable operational experience in international peacekeeping. While the increasing calls for peacekeeping missions make cooperation and burden sharing essential, the UN is—and should remain—the nucleus of activity.

I speak as a practitioner with eight years experience in both UN and non-UN operations. I deliver my remarks today in my capacity as the SRSG to Liberia but I will also draw on my experience from the Balkans—heading UNMIBH and UNTAES.

I will divide my comments into two parts. First, an overview of the important qualities and strengths of UN peacekeeping. Secondly, I will outline what I have come to recognize as five prerequisites for success once the decision has been made to engage. They are: *a clear mandate; a solid organizational structure; strategic planning; strength in leadership and support; and finally, an organized closure of the mission.*

The UN Contribution to Peacekeeping

I am often asked “what is the unique contribution of the UN as a peacekeeping organization?” To my mind the UN has five important qualities.

First is the unique legal and moral authority of the UN Charter. Even amidst all the horrors of the Bosnian war, it remained the only document that was never rejected by any party. Perhaps more than any other document, it represents the common understanding of mankind of the principles that should govern international relations in support of human dignity.

Second, the administrative experience of the UN in fielding peacekeeping missions is unparalleled. In the past 50 years, over 750,000 personnel have been deployed. The professional infrastructure for peacekeeping is well established and accomplished. As the US government has discovered in Iraq, successful peacekeeping requires a different skill set from warfare.

Third, the United Nations brings a legitimacy that other organizations do not necessarily have. While regional organizations bring important qualities to the table, such as in-depth knowledge of the conflict, experience, and diplomatic resolve, they are sometimes

charged with acting in the self-interest of leading member states. The UN is by definition representative of the whole international community and cannot as easily be accused of partiality.

Fourth, in Africa in particular, we all too often see how the willing are not able and the able are not willing. In spite of chronic under-funding, the UN has significantly more resources than other likely peacekeeping candidates. In both Liberia and Sierra Leone, ECOWAS has shown great commitment and timely action. But it has not always been able to provide the essential logistical support, equipment, and training to carry out large-scale peacekeeping tasks. Therefore the UN partnership with regional and sub-regional organizations such as the African Union and ECOWAS is absolutely essential.

The UN can also assist ECOWAS in addressing the regional dimension of conflicts in West Africa, much of which stems from Liberia. With the resources and knowledge accumulated in the region—we have UN missions in Liberia and Sierra Leone and potentially in Cote d'Ivoire and we have a UN Office for West Africa in Senegal—the need for a regional approach can and should be easily met.

Fifth, the multiethnic and multinational nature of UN peacekeeping is itself an asset. In UNMIBH (the UN Mission in Bosnia & Herzegovina), 43 nations contributed police contingents. Between military and police, the numbers for UNMIL will likely be similar. Many of these nations have themselves suffered ethnic conflict and have found the path to reconciliation and democracy. Their positive example sends a powerful message that local problems are not unsolvable, that there is always a way forward and that, with perseverance, peace can be self-sustaining.

Five Fundamentals for Success

In the second part of my address today, I would like to outline five fundamentals I have identified for a peacekeeping operation to be successful.

1. A Clear, Credible, and Achievable Mandate

A clear, credible, and achievable mandate sets the pace for all that follows: the appropriate force size and composition, rules of engagement, and resource intensity. It stands to reason that a confusing mandate will only lead to confusion on the ground.

UNPROFOR had some 70 Security Council resolutions and dozens of Presidential statements. Political negotiating authority was split between the UN, the EU, and the Contact Group. The biggest challenge for any peacekeeper was to understand what he/she was supposed to do before actually taking any action.

The Dayton Peace Accords contain no less than 150 pages divided into eleven Annexes, some 40 pages of Peace Implementation Council Declarations, 92 post-accession criteria for membership in the Council of Europe, and a plethora of further agreements, particularly with the EU and the IFIs. Many of these decisions were never fulfilled. Others never got off the ground and now languish in cyberspace on a series of web-sites.

In contrast, the mandate of UNTAES (the UN Transitional Administration in Eastern Slovenia, Croatia) contained just 13 sentences that could be distilled into six quantifiable objectives. And UNMIBH, which successfully completed its mandate before its termination on 31 December 2002, did so under the authority of 7 resolutions that were further

operationalized through its Mandate Implementation Plan. Comprising 6 practical core goals and corresponding programmes, that plan was both our guide and exit strategy.

My point here is twofold: if you start out and you don't know where you are going, you will probably end up somewhere else. And secondly, the mandate is the floor (but not the ceiling) for everything the Mission does. If the mandate is vague for whatever reason—including the inability of Security Council members to agree on a political end state—dysfunction will plague the lifespan of the mission.

2. A Clear Organizational Structure

This brings me to the second prerequisite for success—a clear organizational structure. Here, let me be rather controversial about the relationship between the military and civilian components of a Mission. The failure of the dual key system in UNPROFOR does not justify the division of a Mission into separate and parallel military and civilian chains of command.

As the Transitional Administrator of UNTAES, I had command and control of both the civilian part of the mission and the military force in an integrated organizational concept. I delegated operational control to my Force Commander. He and I worked in tandem, but the political direction of all Mission components was always in my hands. It worked exceptionally well by making the military force an integral part of the civilian and political process. We are now working with the same structure in UNMIL, which already is making our tasks easier. In UNMIL, as was done in UNAMSIL, we are also integrating our work with the UN agencies by the appointment of the Humanitarian Coordinator as Deputy SRSG for Rehabilitation, Recovery, and Reconstruction.

By contrast, in BiH the military dimension overwhelmed the civilian peace-building aspects. And IFOR was able to limit and circumscribe its own role to such an extent that civilian implementation arguably became exceedingly difficult. We are all aware of the failure to capture notorious war criminals such as Karadzic and Mladic whose continued liberty is a sign of the impotence of the West in the face of evil. If you cannot punish the guilty, you cannot absolve the innocent.

The other point I would make about organizational structure is to question the effectiveness of multiple organizations working in a “Pillar” structure. The UNTAES Mission was fully integrated—we sequentially brought in specialist organizations (the EC, the Council of Europe, UN Volunteers, bilateral donors) for specific tasks according to our overall plan and timetable.

In contrast, the Dayton Accords mandated an unprecedented number of organizations to work under the weak overall coordinating authority of the High Representative. By ignoring the tenet of “unity of command” each of the five principal organizations had its own mandate, budget, and governing body. The result was niche mandate implementation, duplication, and lack of strategic planning.

3. Clear Strategic Planning and Prioritizing

My third prerequisite for success is strategic planning and prioritization, including in resource allocation. We need to ask ourselves why BiH has received more per capita

assistance than Western Europe under the whole Marshall Plan, but still remains weak and unsustainable requiring several more years of intensive international attention.

One reason is that we failed to prioritize the priorities, particularly with respect to rule of law. I have no doubt that rule of law must be placed at the centre piece of practically every peacekeeping mission. Without it, a credible exit strategy is inconceivable—international military forces cannot leave, the economy cannot recover, democracy remains a façade, and corruption and criminalization become entrenched. That is why in UNMIL we will have a solid focus on rule of law with four mission components (CIVPOL, Judicial, Corrections, and Human Rights) integrating their joint activities.

4. Leadership, Personnel, and Support

My fourth prerequisite for success is strength—strength in leadership, support, and personnel.

Leadership and support from the Security Council and key players in a “Contact Group” format is critical. As James Gow has phrased it, the debacle of UNPROFOR as a peacekeeping mission was the “Triumph of a Lack of Political Will”. In UNTAES, we enjoyed the fullest support of the Council to the extent that, when President Tudjman threatened to terminate the Mission prematurely, the Council sent him a strong message by renewing our mandate two months before it was due to expire. In UNMIBH, I enjoyed the consistent support of the Council throughout my tenure.

On the issue of personnel: it is imperative to have a critical mass of trained peacekeepers. In UNTAES, the ratio of international personnel to the local population was 1 to 15. In UNMIBH, we had one international police monitor to every 10 local police officers. Eventually, we will have sufficient strength in UNMIL as well but even as I speak, we are seeing before our eyes in places like Nimba County and other parts of rural Liberia what lack of personnel means in terms of human suffering and the loss of human life.

5. Closure and Departure

Finally, a few words about a Mission’s closure and departure. I have always maintained that the success of a mission is judged not only by what it achieves but also by how it leaves. Following the completion of the UNTAES mandate, long-term monitoring was undertaken by the OSCE to ensure local compliance with ironclad agreements brokered by the Mission. UNMIBH’s success is being sustained by the European Union Police Mission. A seamless transition occurred serving as an excellent example of the regional cooperation called for in the Brahimi Report.

Conclusion

Let me conclude by saying that there is no single answer on how to ensure a successful peacekeeping operation. But I do believe that the United Nations has the legal and moral authority and the experience and knowledge to get it right.

While there can never be a definitive operations manual, there are core lessons and best practices to be considered. Get them right, and an operation has a real chance of success. Get them wrong, and the Mission will collapse or at best flounder on indefinitely, trapping us

into long-term, expensive, and seemingly endless engagements that degrade over time as political fatigue, donor fatigue, and compassion fatigue set in.

A mission stands and falls on the basis of its mandate; its organization; its strategic planning; its leadership and political support; and how it leaves.

In closing, I would like to recognize the thousands of United Nations peacekeepers—civilians, police, and military—for their determination and dedication in the service of peace. A service in which, as you know, many of them made the ultimate sacrifice. For over half a century, they have lived up to the Biblical admonition 'when the question was asked whom shall we send, they stepped forward and said "send us, we will go in your name."'

Thank you very much for your attention and my best wishes for a successful conference.

As for our perennial critics, the nay Sayers and to those who will never wish us well – there is an old Balkan proverb, the dogs may bark – but the caravan moves on.