

A PERSPECTIVE OF COORDINATION BETWEEN THE UN AND REGIONAL ORGANIZATIONS IN PEACE OPERATIONS

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Entering the 21st century, UN peace operations have stepped into a new phase. While their mechanisms have arrived at a time of perfection and deliberation, it is to be expected that the operational capabilities will be further improved and the coordination between the UN and regional organizations will also be enhanced. These advances are not only the expectations of the UN and the international community, but also are necessary for the maintenance of world as well as regional peace and security.

The advantages of regional organizations in peace operations

In playing a much greater role than used to be the case, in recent years regional organizations have developed closer connections with UN peace operations. According to UN publications, up to now, nearly 20 regional, subregional organizations or national organizations have actively participated in UN peace operations to one extent or another. With the participation of regional organizations, the UN is able to share the responsibility and burden and thus counteract its weaknesses, and the cooperation between the countries of a region and the UN on world peace and security matters is also improved, thus contributing to security and stability in the regions concerned.

Generally speaking, regional organizations have the following advantages in safeguarding regional peace and security:

1. Due to their proximity in the neighbourhood of conflict areas, regional organizations are extremely concerned at the conflict situation and not willing to turn a blind eye to the spread of conflict that might endanger the whole region. They are eager to put an end to the conflict as early as possible and so their enthusiasm to respond to UN peace operations is quite apparent.
2. As they possess certain resources and military capabilities, regional organizations can take effective and timely measures and can cooperate with UN peace operations in preventing the occurrence and escalation of armed conflicts. During the peace operations in Sierra Leone, the Economic Community for West African States (ECOWAS) carried out effective peace operations before UN involvement. The peace operations in Georgia and Liberia are two other cases, in which the UN and regional organizations work hand in hand to share the responsibility of peace missions: the UN Security Council authorized regional organizations to establish multinational forces which conduct military operations, while the UN peacekeeping forces are responsible for other duties. In this way, peace operations are carried out by both the UN and regional organizations in the conflict area.
3. Regional countries share much of their culture, traditions and geography, and sometimes, they have the same history, the same religion, and similar

military training or weaponry. The proximity of regional organizations to the conflict area gives them incisive knowledge into the root causes of the conflicts. All these factors should not be overlooked if we are to resolve a conflict and restore peace.

4. Throughout a peace mission, the situations in the conflict region are constantly in a state of flux. At some critical points, if regional organizations are authorized and encouraged by the UN to react swiftly and flexibly instead of consulting UN headquarters, which may not be within easy reach, then possible delay or interruption of the peace efforts will be avoided.

The contribution of regional organizations to peace operations

Thanks to the advantages of regional organizations in conducting peace operations (to be specific, their advantages in resolving regional conflicts), the UN has cooperated for years with them in maintaining regional peace and security. It is common knowledge that the UN is an international organization that has no armed forces and compulsory executive power, rather than an international government. One cannot depend on the UN for everything. Therefore the success of the peace operations lies in the political willingness of the Member States and parties to the conflict. For many years, the UN has often faced a dilemma in implementing its peace operations. Of course, we cannot conclude that it is the failure of the UN, because the UN has lacked the unanimous support of the international community on many occasions. Only with the affirmative political assurance of the UN Member States and regional organizations, and provided with sufficient resources, will a peace mission be able to fulfil its mandate.

The UN Charter endows the Security Council with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of world peace and security, and it recognizes “the existence of regional arrangements or agencies for dealing with such matters relating to the maintenance of international peace and security as are appropriate for regional action” (Chapter VIII, Article 52.1). In Part VII of *An Agenda for Peace*, the former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali emphasized the importance of UN cooperation with regional organizations in peace operations. In the *Supplement to an Agenda for Peace* issued in 1995, he explored further fields of cooperation, including consultation, diplomatic support, operational support, co-deployment and joint operations. On 18 September 1998, the Security Council adopted resolution 1197(1998) which, while focusing on the situation in Africa, contained elements of general application to all regional organizations. The Council recognized the need for strengthening coordination between the United Nations and regional and sub-regional organizations in the area of conflict prevention and the maintenance of peace. The Council also encouraged the Secretary-General to facilitate efforts to establish partnerships between States and regional and sub-regional organizations involved in peacekeeping operations and requested him to consider developing a framework to coordinate such partnerships. Hence, by their active participation in these and similar arrangements, regional organizations are able to provide support to UN peace operations.

Nowadays, regional organizations are making the following three main contributions to UN peace operations:

1. Diplomatic negotiations by regional organizations pave the way for UN peace operations. As have mentioned above, regional organizations often have various close relations with the disputing parties, so their proposals are more practical and acceptable. In the past several decades, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) has made great efforts to resolve conflicts in that war-torn continent. To resolve the armed conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea, the OAU played a mediating role, thus enabling the situation to take a favourable turn and providing the UN with a political basis for the establishment of peace efforts. For this reason, in his report to the Security Council, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan especially praised the OAU efforts, saying that the cease-fire agreement was an important step toward peace between Ethiopia and Eritrea.
2. To ensure the successful enforcement of UN peace operations, regional organizations provide support in the following two aspects. First, regional organizations do the first-stage work for the UN. The peace mission in East Timor is an example: with the authorization of the UN, the Association of the South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Australia took active peace initiatives. Owing to their work, the establishment of the UN peace mission in East Timor went smoothly. Secondly, regional organizations also provide logistic support and guarantee the safety of the UN peace mission. This is the case in Georgia where Russian peace-keeping forces of the Commonwealth of Independent States have supported the UN observer force.
3. Regional organizations and the UN carry out joint peace operations. The UN mission in Haiti was conducted by the UN together with the regional countries and organizations in north and south America. The two sides developed a joint command system and shared the financial costs. Besides, during the establishment of the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), both the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union (EU) dispatched personnel to the posts of the Special Deputy Representatives of the UN Secretary-General.

The negative impact of regional organizations on peace operations

As can be seen, the co-operation between the UN and regional organizations in peace operations have had significant effects. The UN is not the only mediator in the world. Effective cooperation from regional organizations will still be requested in the peace missions to come, especially in missions of larger scale. However, there should be no denying that regional organizations do have their limitations in this regard. First, the cooperation lacks unity of command and clear division of their respective responsibilities. The problem becomes all the more obvious when joint actions are taken by both the UN forces and the regional multinational forces. Second, the lack of essential working personnel, equipment and funds exposes the fact that their ability is unequal to their goodwill or ambition in resolving regional conflicts, therefore they have to fall back on the UN for assistance.

Due to these limitations, regional organizations might have brought about the following negative influences:

1. Some regional organizations are inclined to take advantage of the UN-authorized power for their own political ends. Under the guise of “human rights” or humanitarian aid, certain countries of some regional organizations even ignore UN authority and pursue unilateralism or power politics in the name of UN peace operations.
2. In some cases, the involvement of regional organizations makes their impartiality and neutrality questionable because of their close connections with sovereign states in the conflict area. Some regional organizations or neighbouring countries may have common interests with some parties to the conflict, so their participation in peace efforts is not so welcome and lacks impartiality. Worst of all, they themselves may become involved in the conflict. And instead of resolving the disputes, they may play a role in escalating the conflict.
3. The involvement of some regional organizations could possibly undermine the authority of the UN so that the UN loses control over the peace operations under its name. Besides, too much emphasis on the role of regional organizations might give an impression that peace operations are no longer within the UN scope and that regional organizations may seem to be replacing the UN in peace operations. This kind of regionalization of peace operations is not what the international community needs and can tolerate.

Considering the above-mentioned negative impacts, some countries have proposed to amend the UN Charter so as to enhance the role of regional organizations in peace operations. Their real intention is to have the same authority as the UN. After the outbreak of the Kosovo crisis, some western countries even proposed that the UN should immediately establish a system which enables regional organizations, such as NATO, ASEAN and OAU, to take on the responsibilities of dealing with the crisis. They also claimed that as long as some regional organizations, especially NATO, are allowed to play a global role, they would do everything on behalf of the UN, with or without the UN authorization. These arguments not only tend to marginalize the UN role in peace operations and infringe upon the reputation and credibility of the UN, but also harm the further healthy development of UN peace operations as a whole.

Proper handling of the relationship between the UN and regional organizations

The possible negative impact of regional organizations in peace operations is no excuse to deny their active participation and positive role. Both the UN and regional organizations have their advantages and disadvantages. Hence, on the one hand, the UN should welcome and encourage the participation and cooperation of regional organizations in peace missions; on the other hand, there should be some necessary restrictions so that they would not circumvent the UN in a roundabout way, get out of control and do harm to the peace efforts. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan put it in his report to the Security Council, on the premise that the UN has the primary responsibility for world peace and security, the support from regional organizations is both necessary and expected.

Therefore, to properly deal with the relationship between the UN and regional organizations in peace operations, the following principles should be complied with in accordance with the UN Charter:

1. Through many years, UN peace missions have been creative and relatively successful actions, and UN peace operations should continue to play an active role. At the same time, it should not be permissible for some countries to ignore UN authority and the Security Council, or even intervene into the internal affairs of other countries on behalf of the UN.
2. The UN is the only international organization bestowed with the trust and duties of maintaining world peace and security, therefore it should not offload its responsibilities for preventing armed conflicts from happening, eradicating the roots of disputes and promoting international political, economic and social development. The leading role of the UN in this regard is so great that no other organization is able to replace it. All coordination between the UN and regional organizations must not go beyond the framework of the UN Charter.
3. Before the regional organizations participate, they must first obtain the Security Council's authorization, and they should also deliver timely reports to the UN throughout the operations. In his report to the General Assembly, the UN Secretary-General pointed out that, to maintain the legal basis of international security system, regional security operations must be carried out in accordance with the Security Council's authorization. The Secretary-General also stated that there is no need for the UN and regional organizations to compete with each other in peace and security matters. I believe that this is an important principle that all should adhere to.
4. To strengthen coordination, a liaison mechanism between the UN and regional organizations is badly needed. While the UN is encouraging the active participation of regional organizations, the organizations concerned should also respond accordingly with immediate support and cooperation, thus ensuring the smooth execution of the peace mission.

Conclusion

The UN peace operations will continue to play an important role in safeguarding world peace and security in the days to come in the 21st century. I believe that both challenges and opportunities lie ahead of us in this new century. As we strive to move forward, coordination and cooperation between the UN and regional organizations in peace operations have become an essential part of the UN peace and security mechanism. Therefore, proper handling of the coordination of this kind becomes an important issue.

I believe the key to the coordination issue rests mainly on the following two points:

- Regional organizations should and can play an increasingly important role in peace operations, but without sacrificing the dignity and authority of the UN.
- The UN should do much more to encourage the participation of regional organizations in peace missions, but should not let them do whatever they want without UN control and supervision.

To ensure the success of UN peace operations, a command and supervisory system must be set up and constantly improved. The UN Member States and the relevant regional organizations must have more say and more supervisory power, so

that peace operations can represent the will of the world community. In addition, the mandate of every peace mission should be clearly defined and feasible; the rights and obligations of the Security Council, the Secretary-General and all those involved in must be specifically defined, so that all may adhere to the principles of UN peace operations.

In sum, the UN is the most authoritative international organization that shoulders the primary responsibility of safeguarding world peace and security. Any regional organization, before initiating action in a peace operation, must first inform and consult the UN and obtain its authorization .