

REGIONAL PEACEKEEPING IS NOT THE WAY

by Walter Dorn

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Spurred by the recent success of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Bosnia, there is renewed interest in the idea of employing regional organizations (RO) and equivalent groupings to conduct peacekeeping operations as an alternative to United Nations (UN) missions. The argument is that, being closer to the conflict, such organizations can react faster and have a better understanding of the conflict than the international community as a whole, as represented by the UN. While this may be true in some cases, I contend that regional peacekeeping is, in general, a bad idea. Recent history has shown the many problems and dangers of such operations, whether it be the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)/Russian peacekeeping in Georgia, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)/Nigerian peacekeeping in Liberia, Indian peacekeeping in Sri Lanka or, the Organization of American States (OAS) failed attempts to assume a larger role in Central American peacekeeping (1988-91). The recent United States (US) efforts to establish an independent African (OAU) peacekeeping force are similarly subject to the same drawbacks and seem doomed to produce the same undesirable consequences.

Regional peacekeeping is not the way to go. Here are the reasons why:

1. **Interests.** Regional organizations tend to see conflicts in their regions through the coloured glasses of narrow national or regional self-interest. States in the area usually have close economic, political, military, and sometimes ethnic connections with the conflicting parties. Thus, they are less able and likely to conduct impartial peacekeeping. All too often, regional states are part of the problem and not part of the solution. Personal allegiances between old leaders tend to hold sway over the more important issues of conflict prevention, mitigation and resolution. In most parts of the world, lucrative arms deals and other trade are predominantly conducted through neighbouring states, which resist arms embargoes and other measures that are designed to apply pressure for peace. Regional military alliances also complicate the problem of impartiality. For instance, there is no conceivable way that NATO, which includes both Greece and Turkey, could "peacekeep" in Cyprus. Debates at NATO headquarters would be acrimonious and operations would be stymied. While states in the regions may, on occasion, have more familiarity and a higher level of understanding about regional conflicts than does the UN, their regional biases make

impartial peacekeeping much more difficult, if not impossible. In short, regional organizations have harmful regional interests.

2. **Power perceptions.** Regional organizations tend to be dominated by the major power (some would say bully) of the region. A good example is ECOWAS, which is effectively controlled by Nigeria, and which created Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), a bloody peacekeeping "intervention" in Liberia that did not do justice to the term peacekeeping. After widespread looting and uncontrolled black market activity by ECOMOG forces, the locals in Liberia put new words to the ECOMOG acronym: "Every Car or Movable Object Gone!" Furthermore, it is hypocritical of Nigeria to talk about creating democracy in Liberia and Sierra Leone, when it has none at home. One of the reasons that the OAS backed down on peacekeeping in Central America in the late 1980s was the perception in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala and others in the region that the OAS was largely controlled by the US, with its history of support for dictatorships in the region. Similarly Japanese or Chinese-led peacekeeping forces in Asia would be unwelcome because of historical experiences and current perceptions. While the motives of the Security Council -- or even of the Secretary-General who is responsible for the conduct of UN peacekeeping missions -- can sometimes be questioned, those of regional organizations, led by ambitious regional powers, are much more suspect.
3. **Capacity.** No existing regional organization has the capacity or experience for sustained peacekeeping, except, most recently, NATO (which, though not a declared regional organization, can be treated as one). NATO is primarily a military alliance and the key to success in modern peacekeeping is its multidimensional nature carried out by many actors, including diplomats, civilian police, electoral monitoring officials, aid workers, non-governmental organizations (NGO) and others. Military organizations, such as NATO, are ill suited to handle multidimensional civilian tasks or to work in close proximity with the aid organizations or local populations, which is one of the keys to successful peacekeeping. NATO has been able, in part, to overcome this handicap by working closely with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the UN in Bosnia.
4. **Authority.** The UN possesses the moral authority of a world body that regional organizations lack. The UN was given, in its Charter, the primary mandate for the maintenance of international peace and security. Despite the UN's limitations, challenges and detractors, it remains today the foremost avenue for the pursuit of this goal. Dedicated efforts by Ralph Bunche, Lester B. Pearson, Dag Hammarskjöld (all Nobel Laureates for their contributions) and countless others have developed the instrument that we now know as peacekeeping. Future leaders should build on this progress within the UN (e.g., by the creation

of a rapidly deployable headquarters, by the development of more solid standby arrangements, and the eventual establishment of a standing peacekeeping force). An increased focus on regional organizations has the danger of siphoning off some of the attention, resources and finances for such important UN initiatives. There is no substitute for global action by a global organization.

NATO in Peacekeeping

There are, admittedly, rare occasions when regional forces can assist, or even lead, in peacekeeping while working closely with the UN. NATO, in Bosnia after the Dayton Accord, was one such example. A new peacekeeper, one with muscle, credibility and the direct commitment of a superpower, was helpful after the Dayton Accord. But the introduction of such forces could only be made after the conflict had ended and under UN mandate, if not direction. NATO peacekeeping would not have been appropriate or have succeeded at the beginnings of the Yugoslavian conflict (e.g., when Germany recognized Croatia or when war spilled into Bosnia) and would not likely have lasted as long as the UN Protection Force (UNPROFOR) were it to have been deployed in the middle of the conflict. At the end of the Bosnian conflict, however, when a relatively firm, clear and precise agreement had been accepted, the robust new peacekeeping force was suitable. The NATO forces in Bosnia had the mandate, the approval and the cooperation of the UN.

There are, however, specific dangers that come with the new NATO interest in peacekeeping, in addition to the general ones listed above. NATO could very easily over-extend itself in the future, both in terms of its use of force and in the areas to which it deploys. A purely military approach, using the heavy hand when it is not required, could even give the concept of peacekeeping a black eye. NATO must also be careful not to further exacerbate the fears in Russia, the Arab states and others, as it extends the reach of its force. Any enforcement actions done under the guise of peacekeeping would lead to a disaster, not only for NATO, but also for legitimate global (UN) peacekeeping.

Another problem with NATO is its vulnerability to the precarious and schizophrenic personality of its leader, the US. The US cannot withstand casualties in peacekeeping, as demonstrated by the rapid US withdrawals from Somalia in 1993 and Lebanon 10 years earlier. Its commitment to international missions tends to swing widely, corresponding to the strong but opposite tendencies of isolationism/unilateralism and internationalism within the country. Thus the US alternates between aggressiveness, retreat and inertia, as witnessed in Panama, Somalia and Rwanda, respectively. The traditional contributors to UN peacekeeping, such as the Scandinavians, Australians, Irish (all non-NATO), Canada and others, have a better record of consistency. In fact, Canada has participated in virtually every peacekeeping force created by the UN.

NATO is a large, expensive and expansive organization with connections to a sprawling military-industrial complex covering many countries. While this does have some benefits in terms of capacity, it also gives rise to the problem of the self-interest of their militaries and industries. As an organization in search of a *raison d'être*, it could easily dwarf and possibly marginalize the UN in terms of peacekeeping training and resources. Already NATO peacekeeping in Bosnia is proving to be far more expensive than UN peacekeeping was, even in the more permissive and peaceful environment that currently exists in that country. Some traditional peacekeeping contributors, training organizations and even academics might be tempted to favour NATO peacekeeping because of the potential for large funding, to the detriment of the traditional UN peacekeeping focus. This temptation should be avoided.

Finally, the recent expansion of NATO into the area of peacekeeping should not be used as an excuse or an example for other regional powers, some with more suspect motives, to carry out interventions in their regions in the name of peacekeeping. (In the Cold War, the Warsaw Pact often used the example of OAS/US interventions in the Dominican Republic (1965) and NATO actions elsewhere to help justify intervention in Czechoslovakia (1968) and other states.) The OAU and other regional organizations have been contemplating an expansion into regional peacekeeping. The US originally sought to create an African Crisis Response Force (ACRF) under the OAU but, fortunately, backed down on the idea of a permanent force after the African nations themselves expressed doubts about the merit of such a force.

Conclusion

Regional organizations cannot and should not substitute for the UN in carrying out its primary role in the creation and direction of peacekeeping missions. They have, however, a legitimate and much needed role in peacekeeping training and capacity development, where the closeness of members allows for more frequent meetings and learning can occur in a permissive environment prior to UN deployment. Regional organizations can also play a role in regional security cooperation and diplomatic and economic initiatives.

When, under extraordinary circumstances, regional peacekeeping missions are created, they should be under UN mandate and, preferably, direction. At a minimum, the UN should "at all times be kept fully informed of activities under taken or in contemplation under regional arrangements," as required by Chapter VIII (Art. 54) of the UN Charter. The UN should be more proactive in monitoring the activities of regional organizations. A pipeline of regular information should be developed and reporting should be done not only on previous and current activities, but also on intentions and plans.

In summary, regional peacekeeping should remain the exception and not become the rule. When regional organizations do conduct peacekeeping operations they should be entirely accountable to the UN. In the end, peacekeeping is UN business.

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**Walter Dorn** is a member of the Faculty of the Pearson Peacekeeping Centre and a Visiting Fellow with the Peace Studies Program at Cornell University. [His website is [www.walterdorn.org](http://www.walterdorn.org).]