

Open Lecture

## Extent and Limits of International Solidarity in the 1990s

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Date: November 15, 2002 (13:00-14:10)

Place: ERB II -201

The question that I wish to address is pretty simple. How do we explain that in the 1990s when it comes to peacekeeping operations so much was done and yet so little was accomplished? How do we account for this kind of paradox?

First, what do I mean by so much? I mean simply the fact that in the 1990s, the number of peacekeeping operations which were deployed - close to forty throughout the 1990s, the amount of energy, money, troops deployed was the largest ever in the area of peacekeeping operations. Never before did the United Nations and its key member states had dedicated and committed so much to peacekeeping operations. It is all the more the case considering that the issues that these peacekeeping operations tackled and the modalities that they chose to address them were a huge departure from traditional peacekeeping operations, which had mainly been about interposition and establishing a truce between parties at war while looking for a political solution .

By comparison, the peacekeeping operations were involved in much more complex issues, involving partition of countries, matters of self-determination, massive humanitarian crises. As for the modalities of interventions, they differed much from mere interposition. The peacekeeping operations of the 1990s involved, directly or indirectly, a

range of initiatives that were unthinkable before the 1990s. Humanitarian interventions, be it in Somalia or in the Balkans, mixture of humanitarian aid and peace enforcement, cooperation between the United Nations and NATO in Bosnia and Kosovo, and the establishment of international criminal tribunal were certainly a striking departure from previous peacekeeping operations practices. Yet this unmatched effort appears to be quite modest. And this is the other side of the coin of the paradox that I am trying to think about in my research project.

Indeed, the peacekeeping operations efforts of the 1990s, although impressive compared to the past, tend to be much less impressive on reflection. It is for instance the case when one compares the overall budget of the peacekeeping operations for the 1990s with the resources main powers dedicate to their defence budget. The 10 billions of U.S. dollars that peacekeeping operations cost over 10 years are still minuscule compared to the hundred of billions spent each year for defense, during the same period, by the United States and to a lesser extent by the United Kingdom, France, and other major powers.

Furthermore, the international effort of the 1990s in the field of peacekeeping operations appears also quite modest when it comes to the results that it produced. I do not say here that the United Nations and the key member states backing its efforts could have solved all the crises of the 1990s. After all, some of them had been in the making for years and solutions were not easily at hand. However, we certainly could have done better than what we did in Rwanda, if not in Somalia and the Balkans. In the end, indeed, the results of the peacekeeping operations were rather mixed, as they did not prevent hundred thousands of people to be killed, sometimes under the very eyes of peacekeepers, as it happened in Srebrenica. So how do we explain this kind of paradox, the fact that so much was done yet very little was accomplished in the area of peacekeeping operations in the 1990s?

When it comes to accounting for the mixed results of the peacekeeping operations of the 1990s, there are three main explanations which are put forward in the press, in the

policy making circles, in the public opinion and in academia.

The first one is to explain the shortcomings of the peace operations of the period by putting the responsibility on the United Nations as an inefficient and misguided bureaucracy.

The second explanation is to refer to the lack of political will. As you know, the expression “lack of political will” has been used again and again to describe the limited commitment of the international community vis-a-vis humanitarian crises.

The third explanation put forward is to blame the United States' role, namely for its lack of leadership.