Illusions of a Standing United Nations Force

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Endowing any political entity with the ability to exercise military force invariably engenders spirited debates about its purpose, theoretical operation, and practical feasibility. Key concerns include the potential abuse of power by those in authority to promote the narrow selfish ends of a selected few rather than the common interests of the community, and the safeguards necessary to mitigate such abuses. These considerations are domestically significant but assume even larger dimensions in the international arena.

Catastrophic wars and human suffering on a scale which shocks the conscience generally trigger the call for a permanent mechanism, including, in some instances, a standing international military force, to prevent wars or redress their consequences. The hopes and aspirations of our generation for the establishment of a collective security system are enshrined in the U.N. Charter. But has this collective security system provided an adequate foundation for a permanent international force capable of deterring or redressing acts of aggression? Some argue that sovereignty concerns and narrow national self-interest remain the predominant factors in international relations.

While the U.N. Charter does not provide, expressly or impliedly, for the establishment of a standing U.N. force, it does oblige Member States to make available, on an ad hoc basis and subject to certain conditions, armed forces necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security. Winston Churchill was a key figure in the conceptualization and establishment of the post-World War II collective security system. In 1946, in his famous "iron curtain" speech, he proposed the creation of an ad hoc international military force under the auspices of what was to become the United Nations:

> Courts and magistrates may be set up but they cannot function without sheriffs and constables. The United Nations Organisation must immediately begin to be equipped with an international armed force. In such a matter, we can only go step by step, but we must begin now. I propose that each of the Powers and States should be invited to dedicate a certain number of air squadrons to the service of the world organisation. These squadrons would be trained and prepared in their own countries, but would

move around in rotation from one country to another. They would wear
the uniform of their countries but with different badges. They would not
be required to act against their own nation, but in other respects they would
be directed by the world organisation. This might be started on a modest
scale and would grow as confidence grew. I wished to see this done after
the first world war, and I devoutly trust it may be done forthwith.[1]

The standing multinational collective security force envisioned by Church-
ill, and later by the U.N. Charter, was to be used in enforcement actions
undertaken by the United Nations. Instead, the force evolved into an ad
hoc improvisation called "peacekeeping."

From the first U.N. peacekeeping operation in the Middle East in
1948 to the present, troops and other resources provided to the United
Nations by Member States have been offered on a voluntary basis. The
difficulties encountered by the United Nations in obtaining and deploying
resources required during the initial phases of peacekeeping operations
due to these voluntary arrangements are widely known.

In addition, much of this difficulty is a result of how peacekeeping
missions have multiplied in numbers and complexity in recent years. Ad
hoc U.N. forces are involved in a wide range of operations, from cease-fire
monitoring to protecting humanitarian convoys in Bosnia and Herzego-
vina, and from conventional peacekeeping to settlement implementation
operations such as those in Namibia, Cambodia and El Salvador. By the
end of December 1994, the United Nations had more than 70,000 troops
deployed on seventeen different missions around the world. There is also
continuous pressure on the United Nations to mount additional missions.

In order to accommodate the increasing demand for multinational
forces operating under U.N. auspices, the United Nations has devised a
new scheme for Member State resource contribution. The U.N. Secretary-
General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, has called for the establishment of more
certain standby arrangements.[2] In January 1993, he established a Standby
Forces Planning Team (SFPT) to develop a system of standby resources,
deployable as a whole or in part within an agreed response time for U.N.
duties as mandated by the Security Council. Essentially, the SFPT estab-
lished an inventory of resources necessary for peacekeeping operations,
including personnel, equipment, training, and logistical support. How-
ever, the Secretary-General recently observed that the availability of per-
sonnel and equipment has palpably declined as measured against U.N.
requirements. While a great effort has been made to expand and refine
standby arrangements, there is no guarantee that personnel will be made
available for a specific operation. For instance, in May 1994, when the
Security Council decided to expand the U.N. Assistance Mission for
Rwanda, not one of the nineteen governments that had agreed to have

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1. Winston S. Churchill, The Sinews of Peace, Address at Westminster College
(Mar. 5, 1946), *in* 7 WINSTON S. CHURCHILL: HIS COMPLETE SPEECHES 1897-1963 7285,
7287 (Robert Rhodes James ed., 1974).
2. BOUTROS BOUTROS-GHALI, AN AGENDA FOR PEACE (1992).

personnel on standby agreed to deploy them in support of the U.N. mission.

In light of the unwillingness of Member States to actually deploy military personnel, the Secretary-General has concluded that the United Nations needs to seriously consider a rapid reaction force (RRF). The RRF would be the Security Council's strategic reserve, deployed when an urgent need for peacekeepers arose. It would be comprised of battalion-size units from a number of countries. These units would be trained to the same standards, use the same operating procedures, and be equipped with integrated communications equipment in addition to participating in joint exercises at regular intervals. They would be stationed in their home countries but maintained at a high state of readiness. Of course, the value of this arrangement would depend on the extent to which the RRF would actually be available in an emergency.

On February 22, 1995, the Security Council issued a Presidential Statement in which it merely encouraged the Secretary-General to continue his study of options aimed at improving the capacity for rapid deployment and to take further steps to establish a comprehensive database covering civilian and military resources required to mount and execute peacekeeping operations.

This is where we stand today—while the concerns of leaders from Churchill to Boutros-Ghali as to the military and related capabilities of the United Nations to react to threats to and breaches of international peace and security have been considered, the response has been largely ambiguous.

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