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Robert L. McClure

Morton Orlov II

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# Is the UN Peacekeeping Role in Eclipse?

ROBERT L. McCLURE and MORTON ORLOV II

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On 6 October 1998, the United Nations commemorated 50 years of international peacekeeping with a noteworthy ceremony in New York. At that event, Secretary General Kofi Annan presented the organization's newest award, the Dag Hammarskjold Medal, to the family of the first UN peacekeeper killed in the line of duty--Major René Labarriere of France. Major Labarriere was killed on 6 July 1948 while assigned to the UN's first peacekeeping entity, the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), which was formed to oversee the truce resulting from the Arab-Israeli war of that same year. While UNTSO continues to perform this little-noted mission, the nature of UN peacekeeping has undergone dramatic growth and change in the ensuing decades.

The most dramatic of these changes occurred in the late 1980s, which saw the demise of communism's vain pretense of historical inevitability, the disintegration of the Iron Curtain, and the turn of the international order away from a bipolar world. The numbers themselves tell the evolving story of UN peacekeeping. In the 40 years from 1948 to 1988 the United Nations mounted 13 peacekeeping operations. But since winning the Nobel Peace Prize in 1988 for its sacrifices, the United Nations has undertaken 36 peacekeeping missions. At the peak in 1993, there were more than 80,000 civilian and military peacekeepers from 77 nations deployed around the world, on every continent. As of 31 March 1999, that number had shrunk to slightly more than 12,000 in 14 ongoing UN peacekeeping missions.[1]

To deal with the rising demand for its peacekeeping services, in 1992 the UN created a Department of Peacekeeping Operations--also called DPKO. That department underwent predictable growing pains as member states sought to have the world's premier international organization assume increasing responsibility for resolving conflict in the new world order. This article will outline those initiatives in UN peacekeeping management and describe the recent proposals to restructure DPKO. These recent initiatives, born out of member state frustration, mission/resource mismatch, and a diminished appetite for global agendas, will certainly have a significant effect, in ways yet to be determined, on the next ten years of UN peacekeeping.

## The United Nations: A Primer

Created in the aftermath of World War II, the United Nations was established by the UN Charter, an international treaty ratified by 185 sovereign member states. Although the United Nations has six principal organs, only three deal directly with peacekeeping matters: the General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Secretariat. In the simplest terms, so far as peacekeeping operations are concerned, the Security Council authorizes, the General Assembly budgets, and the Secretariat manages.

The Security Council is the organ with primary responsibility under the UN Charter for maintaining peace and security. Specifically, the Council, with its five permanent and 10 rotating members, can under either Chapter VI or Chapter VII of the Charter direct the undertaking of a peacekeeping mission. The drafters of the United Nations Charter originally envisioned that the Security Council, through its Military Staff Committee, would manage these missions. However, due to the political dynamics of the Cold War, the Military Staff Committee never became an operational body for the supervision of UN military operations. Filling this void, the Secretariat was forced to improvise, creating an executive arm to plan and manage Security Council-directed peacekeeping operations. During the first 40 years, ad hoc and informal arrangements were sufficient to manage the basic peacekeeping operations, which were generally limited in scope.[2]

The General Assembly is sometimes called the closest thing to a world parliament. However, it does not legislate in the same sense as national parliaments do and has no power to compel action by any government. Nonetheless, its

resolutions are perceived to carry the weight of world opinion. The General Assembly's role in peacekeeping is to frame and approve each operation budget, once the Security Council has authorized an operation by adopting an implementing resolution. The General Assembly also has approval authority over the Secretariat's staffing tables, not only for the authorized mission, but for the organization as a whole, particularly for DPKO. Unlike the checks and balances system of the US government, there is no provision for General Assembly vetoes or overrides of Security Council resolutions.

However, much like the US congressional structure, the UN General Assembly has formed committees with specific functional responsibilities, primarily for management oversight of the Secretariat and other UN activities. The two most important committees for the budgeting of peacekeeping operations are the Fifth Committee, composed of career diplomats representing the member states, and the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ), composed of 16 recognized experts from around the world who are charged with reporting to the Fifth Committee on the budgets and accounts of the UN, and on the administrative budgets of the specialized agencies.[3] The Fifth Committee in turn reports to the General Assembly on all UN administrative and budgetary issues. The Secretariat of the UN consists of international civil servants who work directly for the Secretary General, either at the headquarters in New York or elsewhere in field operations throughout the world. DPKO is among the larger elements of the Secretariat.

Finally, in terms of money, there are two budgets at the UN--the regular budget and the peacekeeping support account. The regular budget, approximately \$1.3 billion annually, comes from assessments made on all member states based upon their relative wealth. This pays for the staff and basic infrastructure of the Secretariat, as well as many international programs. The United States failed to pay part of its 1995 assessment and has been in arrears ever since. After peacekeeping operations are authorized by the Security Council, they are funded through a separate assessment of the member states. The scale of assessment for peacekeeping support is different from the scale determining assessments for the regular budget. Noteworthy is the additional surcharge paid by the Security Council's five permanent members (China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States) and higher assessments made on the more industrialized nations.[4] It is from these sources that the peacekeeping support account is drawn. The purpose of this account is to cover the administrative and operational costs of the peacekeeping missions. Most important, this account pays for the nonpermanent staffing of DPKO. The significance of this source of annual funding is that it is scrutinized by the ACABQ and referred for approval to the Fifth Committee and then to the General Assembly. Consequently, any changes to the structure and manning of DPKO are subject to the political winds of the General Assembly.

## **UN Peacekeeping Adapts to the New World Order**

Whereas during the first 40 years of peacekeeping the majority of missions were primarily concerned with the mercifully few intractable interstate conflicts (e.g. the Middle East and the Kashmir), peacekeeping operations since 1988 have proliferated, primarily in response to the fallout from the numerous failed states and a resurgence of ethnic claims of self-determination, primarily in less-developed parts of the world. As part of his "Agenda for Peace," and in order to better manage this increased demand for peacekeeping operations, Secretary General Boutros-Boutros Ghali and the Secretariat created DPKO in 1992, replacing the Office of Special Political Affairs which had responsibility for peacekeeping operations up to that time. While creating an organization to manage the many new missions would be easy, staffing it with qualified personnel would be another matter. Immediately it was recognized that the expertise to manage complex, integrated peace operations did not then exist within the UN headquarters. As a means to remedy the situation, UN General Assembly Resolution 47/71 (12 February 1993) encouraged the Secretary General to "invite member states to provide qualified military and civilian personnel to assist in the planning and management of peacekeeping operations." [5] The UN's need for qualified military officers to manage the increasingly complex peacekeeping operations became more urgent as missions in the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, and Rwanda gained international attention in the early 1990s.

After the General Assembly adopted Resolution 47/71 in 1993, an increasing number of military staff officers from the armies of the member states were assigned on loan, or "gratis," to DPKO. Within a couple of years, nearly a quarter of the department's 400-plus staff were in fact members of their nation's armed forces who worked for the Secretary General. Being gratis meant that although they worked day to day for the UN and not their home country, they were

not formal employees of the UN.

The creation of DPKO was significant because it was both a policy and operational department, and its initial bureaucratic culture was shaped as much by the gratis military officers as it was by its international civil servants. Within the first two years the military's influence in energizing an effective headquarters was most apparent. The department consolidated strategic and operational logistics, mission planning, military advice, civilian police training and planning, peacekeeping training, and current operations under one roof. Many of the original policies and procedures took on a somewhat military, if not NATO, flavor.

As a result, development and support for peacekeeping operations by UN headquarters became progressively more responsive, despite the increase in missions and the more complex humanitarian emergencies of failed states. While some will argue that such UN activity continued to display impotence in peacekeeping (e.g., Bosnia, Angola), it is nonetheless a fact that the organization has been transformed from the post-Somalia/Rwanda days. A more balanced assessment of recent UN action would also include the successful peacekeeping operations in Guatemala, Liberia, and Cambodia. One major reason for the transformation was the cogent military advice present at every step in the political process so that political decisionmakers in the Secretariat and on the Security Council understood the military implications of various policy options. The role of gratis military officers in making this happen was substantial and recognized as such by leaders within both the United States and the UN.[6]

### **General Assembly Reaction and DPKO's Response**

Although countries on every continent and from nearly every culture were represented in the gratis military officer pool, in reality most gratis military officers came from the more industrialized nations. Of the 111 gratis officers assigned to DPKO in June 1997, 69 were from NATO countries, with an additional 19 from close US allies and friends Argentina, Australia, and Brazil. Thus representatives from such countries as Ghana, Namibia, Bangladesh, and South Africa were clearly in the minority. One major reason for this was simply cost. It is not cheap to work and live in the metropolitan New York City area for anyone, let alone military officers funded by less-developed nations.

Seeing this, countries from the Non-Aligned Movement, led by Pakistan, adopted an agenda in 1997 calling for the elimination of gratis military officers in DPKO. They felt particularly underrepresented within the department, a situation that Ambassador Ahmed Kamal of Pakistan called an "unjustified infiltration." [7] This sentiment found its expression in General Assembly Resolution 51/243 on 15 September 1997: "Gratis personnel are not a substitute for staff to be recruited against authorized posts for the implementation of mandated programs and activities." [8] The Non-Aligned's argument against gratis officers was thus twofold: that they were geographically imbalanced toward those countries who could afford gratis officers, giving developed nations an unfair representation, even at a time when increasing numbers of UN peacekeeping soldiers were coming from the third world; and that if DPKO did have a legitimate requirement for positions to support mandated activities, those positions should be filled through the UN's politically sensitive hiring system.

Complementing this external attack was a general resentment many civilian members within UN headquarters felt toward the gratis officers. Specifically, members of the international civil service felt they did not control DPKO as they clearly did the other Secretariat departments. The presence of gratis officers, in their eyes, undermined the traditional method of bureaucratic control in the headquarters, namely patronage. Unlike their civilian counterparts, gratis military officers were not subject to the pressures of patronage and could speak their minds without fear of retaliation or threat to their career. Once their tour was over, these officers knew they would be returning to their national military establishments. In short, there was a mismatch of incentive structures between gratis officers and the international civil servants who had worked years within the UN system, and this hindered close cooperation between the two.

The Non-Aligned's concern over DPKO's structure had some merit, since the department did not have an approved staffing structure to guide its growth from 1993 to 1997. More often than not over that period, if a need arose, say, for transport specialists to oversee military contracts, it was met through an appeal for a gratis military officer with the necessary skills. This haphazard growth by ad hoc requests from the UN to member states, while cost-effective in the short run because the officers came free of charge to the UN, also afforded the department the luxury of never having

to conduct a much needed bottom-up review of its organizational structure. To spur the Secretary General's efforts to reorient DPKO further, the September 1997 General Assembly resolution alluded to above mandated conditions whereby he could accept future gratis personnel only "to provide expertise not available within the organization for very specialized functions" and "to provide temporary and urgent assistance in the case of new or expanded mandates of the organization." The resolution also called for the expeditious phasing-out of all gratis personnel who did not fall within the scope of the new conditions set forth, stipulating that the Secretary General should report quarterly to the General Assembly on his efforts.[9]

Following passage of this particular General Assembly resolution, the Secretariat realized it had to develop a plan to change from an organization dependent on gratis military officers to one that would rely on civilian and military officers paid from the peacekeeping support account.[10] At first, the Secretary General said in a report to the Fifth Committee dated 8 December 1997 that, because the loss of gratis officers would "seriously jeopardize the ability of the department to carry out its functions fully," he intended to phase their positions out over a period of time, to be completed by 31 December 1999.[11] However, that date was immediately abandoned once the department realized it needed to convince the ACABQ and Fifth Committee to finance replacement posts for the departing gratis officers in order to maintain its size and structure. DPKO's strategy was simple, if unsophisticated. To secure support of the Non-Aligneds, the department would accept early departure of gratis officers in an implicit exchange of support for an expanded, and fully funded, civilian structure. This proposal was formally announced when the Under Secretary General for Peacekeeping, Bernard Miyet, briefed the Special Committee on Peacekeeping on 2 April 1998. The General Assembly directs the committee, which consists of nearly 100 member states, to conduct an annual review of peacekeeping in all its aspects and to submit an assessment report that includes recommendations on how to improve UN peacekeeping performance. At this meeting, Miyet said a plan would be submitted to the ACABQ to end the use of gratis personnel by the end of 1998, one year earlier than previously requested by the Secretary General. His resolve on the gratis officer issue was made clear in a press release concerning the meeting, in which he was quoted as saying, "We will try to get rid of them all by the end of the year." [12]

Member states, including those heavily involved in peacekeeping and who had gratis officers within DPKO, were taken by surprise. The department had avoided dialogue with those states contributing gratis officers and had intentionally not provided advance notice of its plan. The Non-Aligneds, desiring immediate departure of the gratis officers, seized upon the proposal for the departure of gratis officers no later than December 1998 and demanded that this be accomplished. The result was that rather than having 18 months to manage the transition of one quarter of its structure from gratis military to contract international civil servants, DPKO would have to transform itself in one-third that time.

Unfortunately, once the offer to eliminate gratis officers was accepted by the Non-Aligneds and Fifth Committee, the department did not have a realistic transition plan and lacked a comprehensive vision of what shape the department would take once they were gone. Hoping to retain as much of its existing structure as possible, DPKO in its budget proposal for the UN fiscal year starting 1 July 1998 called for converting 106 of the 134 gratis positions to paid positions.[13] During a series of difficult and contentious negotiations, first the ACABQ and then the Fifth Committee remained unconvinced that DPKO needed the number of people it claimed in the face of a decline in the number of soldiers on peacekeeping missions from its high point in 1993. After all committee testimony was completed in June 1998, the Fifth Committee finally resolved to hold the department to a compromise deadline of 28 February 1999 for the departure of all gratis military officers and to review the matter about staffing numbers in October 1998 during the 53d General Assembly. The Secretariat met the deadline, but at the price of a poorly coordinated transition which resulted in little or no overlap between the departing gratis officers and their newly hired replacements.

### **Implications for the United States**

Over the past half century, there has been an evolution in the international consensus on how to staff, structure, and manage peacekeeping operations at the United Nations. For the first 40 years the rigid nature of the Cold War limited the number of missions and ensured that they were relatively simple operations, with UN forces interposed between two hostiles. Consequently, they were managed, more or less successfully, in an ad hoc fashion by the UN's Secretariat. When the dramatic need for large and increasingly complex operations became apparent early in the 1990s, the international community called upon the UN to assume a larger role and volunteered military officers to help staff

DPKO. Our own government, as outlined in Presidential Decision Directive 25, *The Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations*, moved aggressively to assist the Secretary General's peacekeeping initiatives. At one point, over a dozen US officers from all services were assigned gratis to DPKO. These officers did not arrive in time to shape UN operations in Somalia or Bosnia, but their presence did bring the UN greater capacity in the areas of mission planning, logistics, peacekeeping training, doctrine development, and management of day-to-day operations.

While their assignment to the UN did indirectly benefit overall US foreign policy, there has been a more direct benefit through the establishment of a training relationship between the UN and several unified commands. The need for peacekeepers, UN or otherwise, remains undiminished, and many militaries around the world are pushing hard to participate in peacekeeping operations and to have their officers and soldiers trained for such use. In response, several Commanders-in-Chief of US regional unified combatant commands have hosted or helped organize peacekeeping exercises with nations in their areas of responsibility, all in consonance with the engagement element of US national strategy.

However, as we have seen, the international consensus has changed. A clear message has been sent that the UN's General Assembly does not want gratis military officers, particularly those from the developed nations, managing peacekeeping operations. At the same time there also appears to be Security Council reluctance to mount large-scale operations involving thousands of UN blue-helmeted peacekeepers. Unfortunately, while technically successful, the staffing of DPKO with gratis officers created a culturally different department from any other in the Secretariat. Consequently, conflict was unavoidable both within the Secretariat and between constituent blocs of member states over how peacekeeping operations should be controlled, on the one hand, and how the Secretariat should be staffed, on the other.

Indeed, one can argue that the UN has in some ways become marginalized in light of a trend toward the consignment of peacekeeping operations to regional organizations like NATO in Bosnia, the Commonwealth of Independent States in Georgia, and ECOMOG[14] in West Africa. The UN's role in these missions seems to be to provide a cloak of legitimacy and limited political oversight through deployment of a small numbers of observers. In the Balkans, however, the Yugoslavian government successfully insisted that any use of peacekeeping or protection forces in Kosovo occur under the sanction and auspices of the UN, regardless that it was NATO, acting independently, that conducted the coercive aerial campaign against Yugoslavia.[15] That fact notwithstanding, the heightened challenge of failed-state peacekeeping has cooled the initial international enthusiasm for peacekeeping operations.

The implications for the United States, and its Army, of a weakened peacekeeping capacity at the UN are significant. Properly employed and supported, UN peacekeeping operations are a force multiplier for the United States in the sense that an effective UN peacekeeping operation means one less potential demand on our already limited military resources. Having gratis officers at the UN gave the United States the opportunity to influence events, improve UN performance and chances for success, and decrease the likelihood of direct US military involvement. Without a robust United Nations peacekeeping capacity, the US military will likely find itself more frequently involved in conflicts around the world, either out of humanitarian concerns or on grounds of vital national interests. Sending troops on repetitive peacekeeping assignments increases our forces' operating tempo and runs the danger of dulling the warfighting skills of tactical units. Recent experiences in Bosnia and Haiti illustrate this problem, and highlight the open-ended nature of these missions. The US government has already acknowledged that its troop commitment in Kosovo is "open-ended."

In order to have a greater opportunity to shape policies and organizational performance at the UN, the United States should consider recommitting itself to the organization--and paying dues that are in arrears would be a constructive first step. Agreed, the United Nations is not perfect. It can be maddeningly frustrating at times and certainly bureaucratic. Still, as a result of the gratis officer and other initiatives, it is far better and more efficient in the military arena than it was even five years ago, almost to the point of being a totally different organization. It would be counterproductive if, through shortsightedness, we allowed the potential of this force multiplier to waste away. With Presidential Decision Directive 25 and the assignment of talented officers to the UN five years ago, the United States said it was committed. An update of PDD 25 now would reaffirm this commitment, enhancing prospects for UN peacekeeping to remain an effective complement to our nation's security strategy.

As for the future of UN peacekeeping, at the very least it appears that the ability of the UN to effectively plan and execute peacekeeping operations will be significantly degraded for many months, if not a year or more. This is unfortunate because a successful peacekeeping mission, particularly now, would help restore the UN's credibility. It is in our national interest to ensure that the UN retains its capacity to plan, manage, and support peacekeeping operations. One hopes the current degradation in capacity will be temporary and that the United Nations will again earn the international support necessary to "save succeeding generations from the scourge of war," the noble aspiration proclaimed in the opening line of its Charter.

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## NOTES

1. Statistic from <http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/troops.htm>, accessed 1 May 1999.
2. Article 47 of the UN Charter establishes the Military Staff Committee, consisting of the Chiefs of Staff of the Permanent Members of the Security Council or their representatives. It is "responsible under the Security Council for the strategic direction of any armed forces placed at the disposal of the Security Council." Today the Military Staff Committee rarely meets and has ceded total control of peacekeeping operations to DPKO and the UN Secretariat.
3. New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook* (Wellington, New Zealand: Hutcheson, Bowman and Stewart, 1995), p. 26.
4. Ten countries pay 88 percent of the peacekeeping assessment: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Russia, Spain, United Kingdom, and the United States. The United States is assessed at 30.5 percent but, at the direction of Congress, pays only 25 percent. In 1997-98 the cost of UN peacekeeping operations was approximately \$1 billion, for which the United States was assessed \$268 million. The account also pays for 279 of the 343 positions currently authorized in DPKO. See also, [http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/pk50\\_w.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/DPKO/pk50_w.htm).
5. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 47/71, 12 February 1993, *Comprehensive Review of the Whole Question of Peacekeeping Operations in All Their Aspects*, para. 37.
6. Secretary General Kofi Annan recognized the valuable contribution of gratis military officers in comments made at a DPKO town hall meeting at UN headquarters, 29 October 1998, attended by one of the authors.
7. "Secretariat News," United Nations Headquarters, New York, September-October 1998.
8. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 51/243, 15 September 1997, *Gratis Personnel Provided by Governments and Other Entities*, para. 1.
9. *Ibid.*, para. 4. (a) and (b).
10. The Peacekeeping Support Account was established in 1993 to fund peacekeeping operations separately from the regular budget and to fund the headquarters functions that became necessary with the management of numerous missions. With the departure of gratis military officers, all personnel in DPKO will have to be paid either from the regular budget, which is currently capped, or from the peacekeeping support account. Therefore, the departure of 134 gratis military officers has significant budgetary implications.
11. Report of the Secretary General, "Phasing Out the Use of Gratis Personnel in the Secretariat," 8 December 1997, para. 14.
12. United Nations Press Release GA/PK/155 dated 2 April 1998, "Under-Secretary-General Announces Proposal to End Use of Gratis Personnel in Peacekeeping Department by End of Year." See also <http://www.un.org/plweb-cgi/idoc>.
13. Report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, "Gratis Personnel Provided by Governments and Other Entities," 7 May 1998, para. 17.

14. Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group.

15. Thomas W. Lippman, "Yugoslavs Begin Kosovo Retreat," *The Washington Post*, 11 June 1999, pp. A1, A22.

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Colonel Robert L. McClure commands the 1st Infantry Division's engineer brigade, in Bamberg, Germany. He previously was assigned to the Mission Planning Service, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, at the United Nations headquarters in New York. Before his UN assignment he was an Army War College Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and commanded the 92d Engineer Battalion, Ft. Stewart, Georgia. He is a graduate of the US Military Academy and the US Army Command and General Staff College, and holds master's degrees in public administration from Harvard and in systems management from the University of Southern California.

Lieutenant Colonel Morton Orlov II is an infantry officer assigned to the US Mission to the United Nations in New York City. Recently selected for battalion command, he was the Chief of Plans for the 25th Infantry Division and the Deputy Chief of Plans for Multinational Force Haiti during Operation Uphold Democracy in 1995. He is a graduate of Tufts University, the US Army Command and General Staff College, and the School of Advanced Military Studies.

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Reviewed 20 August 1999. Please send comments or corrections to [carl\\_Parameters@conus.army.mil](mailto:carl_Parameters@conus.army.mil)