

Expanding UN Peacekeeping Operations Since 1990

Written by Andrea Pavón Guinea

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ANDREA PAVÓN GUINEA, JAN 18 2013

The United Nations Charter does not provide any definition of what a peacekeeping operation is, therefore its characteristics have been created over the time. Despite that fact, the UN has carried out 67 peacekeeping operations since 1948. Surprisingly, 54 of them have taken place since 1988. The content of this essay briefly explains the main functions of the two main UN organisms and focuses on the Security Council in order to explain why there were such a small number of peacekeeping operations during the Cold War. Moreover, the disintegration of the USSR broke the deadlock in the Security Council and along with military and globalization concerns, also accounts for the increasing number of operations after 1990. What is more, scholars and politicians have claimed that humanity is beyond national interests as the main reason of the growing number of peace operations. Nevertheless, I would argue that international relations are dominated by Great Powers, specifically China, Russia and the United States, and analysing their attitudes through peacekeeping after 1990, it can be clearly seen how *realpolitik* still shapes the political world.

Above-mentioned is the fact that the UN Charter does not define what a peacekeeping operation is, therefore there is not a universal definition to conceptualize the term. "It was this need [during the Cold War] to avert the potential escalation of local conflicts into superpower confrontations, coupled with an inability to act, that led to the development of peacekeeping"[1]. That is to say, "peacekeeping was adopted during the Cold War as a substitute for collective security and in response to the stalemate between the Permanent Members of the Security Council"[2]. Consequently, peacekeeping was conceived as an *ad-hoc* tool whose functions were configured over the time due to the lack of an explicit definition. Various consequences can thus be observed: "In practice, UN peace operations have developed as *ad hoc* responses to particular crises, therefore the key concepts of traditional peacekeeping (consent, impartiality, minimum use of force) are often interpreted differently in contemporaneous missions, broadening the way in which the international community understands what a threat to international peace is"[3].

Nevertheless, the Article 1(1) of the Charter clearly states which is the main aim of the United Nations, that is, *to maintain international peace and security*. "This rationale is usually cited as the legal basis for peacekeeping"[4]. What is more, chapters VI (peaceful measures), VII (enforcement measures) and VIII (regional arrangements) of the UN Charter specify which measures are to be taken in order to maintain international peace and security. "Peacekeeping was often referred to as a 'Chapter VI and a half' activity, meaning that it fell somewhere between both"[5]. Moreover, the General Assembly and the Security Council are specifically charged with maintaining the international peace and security. The General Assembly can "apply pressure on the Council to undertake peacekeeping operations. Indeed, the UN's first peace operation [UNSCOB in Greece] was authorized by the Assembly rather than the Security Council"[6]. The *Uniting for Peace Resolution* (1950) enables the Assembly to pass a resolution recommending collective measures when the Security Council is not able to reach an agreement: "this resolution was originally passed to counter Soviet threats to veto further Security Council resolutions with regard to the ongoing war in Korea"[7]. However, it is the Security Council, whose resolutions are binding on all member states, which is given primary responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security under Chapters V-VIII and XII of the UN Charter[8]. Within its composition, there are five (out of fifteen) Permanent Members, which hold power of veto and without their consent any resolution can be passed.

Furthermore, this power of veto deeply explains the nature, number and scope of UN peacekeeping operations over the time. The United Nations is not an international government. In fact, "the Organization has rarely seemed more

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than the sum of its arguing parts"[9]. It is composed of sovereign states, which are charged with formulating the rights and obligations of the Organization. Having said that, and taking into account the main role of the Security Council, it is obvious that its Five Permanent Members are the most influential ones in the configuration of peacekeeping operations. What is more, "the fullest perspective on peacekeeping...is one that places it firmly in the context of international politics"[10]. And international politics are the reason why there was a small number of peacekeeping operations between 1948-1988: "the narrative that has undeniably dominated the issue of peacekeeping has revolved around the discourse of bi-polar Cold war politics, where a superpower stand-off in the Security Council disabled the possibility of collective security as envisaged in the UN Charter"[11].

In addition, peacekeeping operations were mainly developed in order to prevent local conflicts from escalating into a superpower confrontation: "peacekeeping provided a mechanism for resolving international conflicts without superpower involvement"[12]. Yet, despite such small number [13], peacekeeping operations were modestly successful, including "the effective freezing of many international conflicts, some reduction of competitive interventions by major powers and the isolation of local conflicts from the Cold War's ideological struggle"[13].

Notwithstanding, and undeniably surprising, from 1988 to 1992, the Security Council authorised as many peacekeeping operations as it had authorised during all the Cold War: "The end of the Cold War meant the end of the post-1945 deadlock in the Security Council and a period of maximum cooperation began with the international response to Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait"[14].

Peace operations also underwent a qualitative transformation, as more complex missions were carried out: "In places such as Cambodia, Bosnia and Somalia, the UN married peacekeeping with the delivery of humanitarian aid, state-building programmes, local peacemaking and elements of peace enforcement"[15]. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the increase in number did not mean an increase in effectiveness: "by 1995, the catastrophes in Angola, Somalia and Rwanda had prompted many states to re-evaluate the value of peace operations and the nature of their contribution to them"[16]. These catastrophes were due to the lack of will of the UN Member States and the lack of UN funding and institutional capacity. Yet, the analysis of these failures would exceed the content of this essay.

The years 1988 to 1993 witnessed the striking increase in the number of peacekeeping operations due to a mixture of factors. Undoubtedly, the main factor, above-mentioned, was the resulting much more permissive Security Council because of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Secondly, governments had more military capacity after the end of the Cold War, as the major strategic challenge was over: "some militaries themselves had an interest in taking on new roles in order to justify their budgets"[17]. Thirdly, governments started considering peacekeeping operations as "politically desirable": "Globalization was accompanied by the spread of mass communication technology, which permitted the almost instantaneous reporting of humanitarian catastrophes, combined with the putative triumph of liberalism over communism and the success of the first Gulf War, this created expectations among publics that their governments would become engaged in resolving violent conflicts overseas"[18]. For example, Brazil, South Africa or India committed their troops to peace operations to support their claim to become Permanent Members in the Security Council[19]. What is more, globalization has also transformed a 'Westphalian' world into a 'Post-Westphalian' one. That is to say, whereas peacekeeping operations were initially conceived as a means to resolve conflicts by respecting state sovereignty and the principle of non-interference, they are now based on a different concept of sovereignty: "states enjoy full sovereign rights only if they fulfil certain responsibilities towards their citizens, therefore the role of peace operations is to assist states in fulfilling these responsibilities and to assume them when the host state proves itself unable or unwilling to do so"[20].

Following this argument, Andersson[21] asserts that the increasing number of peacekeeping operations after 1990 was due to a change from *realpolitik* to *idealkolitik*. The scope of her study covers the years 1990-1996 and her findings show that "the level of participation in peacekeeping operations increases as the level of democracy within the contributing state increases", and "the probability of peacekeeping operation increases when the recipient state is non-democratic". It leads her to affirm that democracies are the major contributors to peacekeeping operations and

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they seek to intervene in non-democratic states in order to build democracies, because the more democracies, the fewer wars. Moreover, they use peacekeeping operations as a means to achieve their aims because democracies are shaped by the *idea of law and order* and the UN confers legitimacy to such operations. That is to say, “the democratic community has re-conceptualized its national interest from short-term physical survival imposed by the Cold War to encompass the long-term promotion of its philosophy, basically based on the democratic peace theory”[22]. Similarly to Andersson, the UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali reflected in his document *Agenda for Peace* the same universalist and communitarian approach; and declared “the commitment to the primacy of values over interests in the international community”[23].

Nevertheless, I would argue that a close analysis of the state’s behaviour reveals how national self-interests still shape state’s views on peacekeeping. In fact, the current events in Syria perfectly indicate how the world is still configured by *realpolitik*; and the reminiscences of ideological power struggle that still dominate a Security Council divided between the vetoes of China and Russia, who are opposed to an intervention claiming the paramount international principles of non-interference and sovereignty, and the *West*, led by the United States, who is willing to intervene invoking *The Responsibility to Protect*.

However, it is well known that the US wishes to intervene in order to protect its security interests in the *Middle East*. In fact, material interests are those that have shaped the States’ contribution to peace operations from 1945 and from 1990, likewise. Lebovic[24] has empirically demonstrated how “the immediate security interests of a country, including state’s power, rivalry and stake in operations, determine its UNPO contributions”[25]. It evidently supports a realist theory, which “depicts international relations as a constant struggle for power among self-interested states”[26].

As a result, self-interested states, starting with Russia, influenced the expansion of peace operations. It is commonly believed that the “new political thinking” of Gorbachev meant the adoption of a universalist paradigm of international relations.

The USSR even began in 1987-88 to pay its arrears for the financing of peacekeeping operations. However, he acknowledged that a *glasnost* was essential because “Russia has no choice but to integrate with the West and the broader international community in order to remain as a viable state”[27]. Consequently, he is prioritizing the state’s survival. What is more, “whatever the universal pretension of the leadership in Moscow, they inherited a territorial space, a polity, and an economy that dictated certain preoccupations in foreign and national security policy”[28]. Hence, there are four primary reasons for Russia’s involvement in peacekeeping missions after 1990.

Firstly, specific security concerns: the disintegration of the USSR left more than 25 million of Russian speakers who suffered threats from their new states. As a result, Russia utilizes peacekeeping in order to limit their migration back to Russia, migration that Russia cannot afford[29]. Secondly, Russia is involved in peacekeeping operations in order to cooperate with the West and benefit economically from it. Thirdly, the breakup of the USSR made Russia lose its position of equality with the United States, therefore peacekeeping is part of a search for equality among the great powers. Lastly, ideological power struggles have not completely disappeared and Russia’s involvement in peacekeeping provides it with opportunities to defend ideological allies and recreate its former imperial power[30]. For instance, “to them, Russian troops in Bosnia are not peacekeeping troops but rather protection forces against the imperial West that tries to destroy the Slavs and the Orthodox Church”[31].

Regarding China, towards the late 1980s, China’s position on peacekeeping shifted towards an increasing grade of participation, as “moving towards a more market-oriented economy, China found itself having to embark on a major foreign policy shift”[32]. Furthermore, “participation in peacekeeping allows China to professionalize its armed forces [stated in China’s National Defence White Paper in 2008][33] and to help attain its aspirations in becoming a major global power”[34]. Moreover, Lawson[35] has empirically established economic interests as the major motivating factor for China to contribute to peace operations: “During 1989-2010, China’s participation and contribution to peacekeeping operations had a statistically direct relationship with average annual levels of aggregate bilateral trade and imports of key industrial materials”[36]. As a result, over three-quarters of deployed Chinese peacekeepers serve in Africa missions: “China imports a substantial amount of oil from the continent and receives raw industrial

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material from a wide base of African partners"[37]. These economic interests were clearly seen since the 1990s, when "Chinese elites understood that supporting the fight against Iraq would have a broad set of economic benefits"[38].

In fact, the Bush Administration ended the US-imposed sanctions on Beijing, soon after the Security Council passed the resolution with the essential Chinese approval[39].

The United States also considers peacekeeping as a means to advance its interests: "Peacekeeping missions advance key foreign policy and national security interests, while simultaneously requiring little from the US in terms of personnel and spreading the financial burden among all UN member states"[40]. What is more, a report published by the Defence Institute of Security asserts that "peace and security activities of the UN directly support US national interests" and explains how the map of UN peace operations coincides with US geopolitical interests, controlling the borders of Israel or resolving conflicts in Europe or in the Persian Gulf[41]. This closeness of interests may explain why the United States has adopted a multilateral perspective of peacekeeping since 1990, best defined, during the Clinton era, as "self interested multilateralism": "Clinton Administration decided that they would continue to pursue humanitarian interventions under the aegis of the UN with the condition that the interventions relate to a vital US interest"[42]. That explains the non-intervention in Rwanda (Clinton thought it would threaten his chances for re-election) and the interventions in both Bosnia and Kosovo: "Vital US interests were at stake in Bosnia and Kosovo because the regional conflict could spread to the whole Europe, damaging Europe's economy and therefore US economy"[43]. What is more, the Bush Administration (2001-2009), apart from endorsing peacekeeping as a multilateral tool to fight terrorism, has even used peacekeeping as a bargaining tool against the international community to immunize US troops from the International Criminal Court"[44].

In conclusion, arguing that liberal democracies share interests and therefore they cooperate in peacekeeping is a fruitless argument since the international system is anarchic, the power is the key and universal moral principles cannot be applied to the action of states, following the realist paradigm. There is no doubt that the United Nations cannot be considered a central authority since it is ruled by sovereign states. And these sovereign states, specifically the Security Council Great Powers, are those that have shaped the trends in peacekeeping operations. Consequently, the egoistic passions and self-interests of the states, in terms of military, economic and diplomatic power, marked the increasing number of UN peacekeeping operations after 1990, and not the altruism of protecting human rights worldwide.

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Written by: Andrea Pavon Guinea
Written at: University of Essex
Written for: Steve Pickering
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