

Report on the NGO-Government Dialogue
"Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability for the UN: Taking Stock"

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for

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on behalf of
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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Report of the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.	3
Discussion	5
Civilian Staffing and Management	5
Security Council Mandates	5
Financing Arrangements	6
Canadian Perspectives and Capacities	6
RCMP	6
CIDA	7
DND	7
Options and Initiatives	8
Appendices	
List of Participants	10
Documents	11

- Introduction -

The World Federalists of Canada, in collaboration with the United Nations Association in Canada, organized an NGO-Government Dialogue, "Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability for the UN: Taking Stock," held in Ottawa, November 19, 2001. The project was sponsored by the Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee, a network of over 60 Canadian non-governmental organizations. Planning for the meeting was carried out jointly by a committee of NGO and government representatives.

In 1995, the Government of Canada issued a study which examined the obstacles to UN rapid reaction in the event of an unfolding humanitarian crisis, and provided practical recommendations to enhance the UN's rapid reaction capability. Several of the recommendations in, "Towards a Rapid Reaction Capability for the United Nations," have since been implemented as components of the Brahimi Report.

The NGO-Government Dialogue in Ottawa had two principal objectives. One was to develop a better understanding among civil society organizations of recent progress towards a UN rapid reaction capability, and to assess the challenges still faced in this process. The second was to allow civil society organizations to consider new initiatives through which to engage these challenges.

The seminar was not intended to provide the basis for immediate action, nor to agree on one particular solution. It was designed instead to explore common interests, to share information, and to establish new channels of communication both within civil society and between civil society and the Government of Canada.

- Report of the UN Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations -

The seminar opened with an update led by Ambassador Michel Duval, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the United Nations, on the current status of the implementation of the recommendations of the Brahimi Report and the more recent recommendations of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

Ambassador Duval began by reviewing the changing nature of peace operations. He emphasized that although force was rarely used in Cold War UN peace operations, UN authorizations for the use of force since the end of the Cold war have proliferated. The scope of peace operations has also broadened considerably in the past decade, such that peace operations can no longer be considered exclusively in military terms. Contemporary peace operations involve the active participation of military, civilian police, and civil society actors.

It was observed that the UN has had a mixed record in peace operations, including clear successes (such as the operations in Namibia and Mozambique), and clear failures (such as the operations in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda). Recent demands for larger and more robust peace operations have necessitated the establishment of peace operations outside of Security Council control. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) operation in Liberia, the NATO stabilization force in the Balkans, and the Australian-led multilateral operation in East Timor are all examples of a new type of humanitarian intervention, which can be distinguished from traditional UN peacekeeping.

Participants were reminded that the idea of a UN rapid reaction capability is as old as the UN itself. While one of the main obstacles to the establishment of such a capability - Cold War politics - no longer presents a problem, national sovereignty remains a key source of political resistance to the implementation of a rapid reaction force. Since the end of the Cold War, the willingness for many western governments to contribute to peace support operations has declined, even when at times the need for a UN response capability has become more acute.

In light of the tension between the need for a more robust intervention regime, persisting concerns related to national sovereignty, and a diminishing pool of resources, it was suggested that a UN rapid reaction capability must be limited to traditional peacekeeping operations. The UN framework can provide the legal and political basis for providing some authority when member states intervene (e.g. "coalitions of the willing") to undertake more robust humanitarian intervention operations when needed.

It was noted that progress towards a UN rapid reaction capability for traditional peacekeeping operations is underway, albeit slowly. With the exception of a Rapid Deployable Mission Headquarters, the key recommendations in Canada's 1995 report have been integrated in the reforms of the Brahimi process. The UN Standby Arrangement System (UNSAS) and the Multinational Stand-by Forces High Readiness Brigade for UN Operations (SHIRBRIG) are both being put into practice, and a strategic equipment reserve at the UN Logistics Base in Brindisi, Italy should be in place within the next year.

One challenge facing the use of SHIRBRIG is that a large pool of resources is needed to allow for last minute reductions in resource commitments by individual member states. As of yet, only a few members are willing to deploy the formed units needed for an effective force. Another factor limiting the utilization of SHIRBRIG is that although between four and five thousand personnel have been committed as operationally ready to deploy for traditional peacekeeping operations within the requisite thirty days, these personnel are earmarked for a deployment of only six months. A pragmatic condition of their deployment is thus the establishment of clear commitments from member states to maintain the operation with follow-up forces after the initial six month period. It was suggested that a twelve month deployment may be more efficient.

At the UN, the organizational restructuring of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) is scheduled to be completed by 2004. Provisions are also being made at the UN to develop on-call lists to address the shortage of specialists needed for rapid deployment. The full realization of reforms at the UN cannot be achieved, however, unless governments prove more ready to back up their commitments when needed. Although governments cannot be expected to respond automatically, it was suggested that improving the Security Council's ability to act as a cooperative management system – for example, by including troop contributors in management decisions that bear direct impact on their personnel and resources – may enhance the trust that member states have in the Security Council.

Discussion

Reiterating the fact that contemporary peace operations are not exclusively military affairs, several participants sought further clarification of progress in non-military terms. Selected areas of concern were (a) civilian staffing and management; (b) the evolution of Security Council mandates; and (c) the evolution of UN financing mechanisms.

A: Civilian Staffing and Management

With regard to the coordination of civilian staffing and management, the Integrated Mission Task Force (IMTF) was one of the primary mechanisms discussed. IMTFs are becoming a popular vehicle for mission-specific coordination and support activities, and include non-military actors. The IMTF established in Afghanistan, for example, is chaired by the UN Department of Political Affairs (DPA), and calls upon the support of many civilian agencies.

A key advantage of the IMTF model is that it ensures an integrated management of missions, involving key actors, both at UN headquarters in New York and in the field. One problem with IMTFs, however, is that they are difficult to organize, involving various agencies and actors (military, police, civilian), and requiring substantial commitments from managers of different organizations to overcome often conflicting agendas. Much work will be needed to reduce resistance from the managers at the UN and other agencies, as well as from member states, to the idea of an integrated management of missions.

A second mechanism under development, which is intended to address the problem of locating civilian experts, is the Galaxy project. Galaxy is a computer-managed database of pre-selected, on-call civilians with appropriate expertise and the ability to deploy on short notice. One concern regarding the Galaxy project is that it resembles a similar project attempted by the UN Development Programme (UNDP), which was not successful. Like IMTFs, Galaxy also depends on the active cooperation of member states. It was suggested that although the UN has taken the first step, member states must now work to ensure a follow through. Perhaps the OSCE model (making national level rosters available for the UN to tap into) would be more effective.

B: Security Council Mandates

Another concern raised during the discussion period was that the UN has not yet addressed with concrete action the Brahimi report's call for timely, clear and realistic mandates. In this context, two problems were raised.

First, it was suggested that the inability of the Council to develop clear mandates is one reason why UN peacekeeping forces are not adequately equipped. Second, it was posited that it is likely that the UN will need to continue to sanction non-UN multilateral coalitions to carry out complex and costly stabilization missions such as NATO's SFOR in the Balkans.

Related to the problem of growing reliance on non-UN multilateral coalitions is the "legitimacy question." What standards and accountabilities governing the intervention are employed in these instances? Perhaps a contribution to evolving norms would flow from the anticipated report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty.

C: Financing Arrangements

Concern was also expressed over the need for reform in the UN system of financing arrangements for peacekeeping. It was observed that the current UN Trust Fund system is designed to account for money rather than to distribute it, and that money needed for daily operational tasks has been slow in coming in even such politically benign theatres as East Timor. UN Trust Funds, for instance, are dependent on voluntary contributions, which are themselves often tied to a particular set of conditions.

- Canadian Perspectives and Capacities -

Updates on the recent activities of the Canadian government were provided in the afternoon session by colleagues from RCMP, CIDA, and DND. Discussion followed.

RCMP

Canadian civilian police personnel play an important role in peace operations. Through the training, monitoring and support of local police forces, they provide a crucial bridge between peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Moreover, by helping to prevent elements of organized crime from exploiting the time lag between UN authorization of a mission and its actual deployment, "policekeeping" has also become a significant component of effective rapid reaction.

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is responsible for managing Canadian civilian police participation in peace operations. The RCMP does not have a peacekeeping or rapid reaction capability of its own, nor a specific peacekeeping mandate. Instead, the RCMP responds on an ad hoc basis to requests from DFAIT, and acts in administrative coordination with DFAIT, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), and the Solicitor General of Canada. If and when the RCMP determines that the request for a police presence in a peace operation is both acceptable and achievable, the RCMP then coordinates the deployment of volunteers from among nineteen Canadian Police Forces, including those at the provincial and municipal level.

Funding for police participation is received as a percentage of CIDA's budget, determined in relation to the number of police officers deployed in each instance. While this arrangement covers some of the costs of deployment, a number of shortcomings were identified. One problem is that officers volunteering for peacekeeping must be excused from their regular police duties. Participation thus relies on the ability and willingness of individual departments to accommodate the absence of regular officers.

A second challenge is that of training. The Civilian Police Arrangement (CPA) provides some funding for the identification and training of officers for peacekeeping, but operates within the constraints of a tight scope and limited budget. The result is that the CPA is often unable to meet the demand for civilian police in peace operations, and/or cannot identify and train officers quickly enough for rapid reaction.

There is a need to be able to deploy police on the ground more quickly.

An RCMP policy options paper being prepared earlier this year was tabled after the events of September 11.

With a more permanent and stable source of funding, the RCMP could establish a core team of experienced veterans and specialists not engaged in regular police duties. It was estimated that, based on a \$125 000 cost per officer deployed, and including administrative costs, \$32 million could provide for a rapid deployment team of two hundred civilian officers. This team could be deployed on short notice, reducing the RCMP's average deployment time of eight weeks to a much shorter window of forty-eight hours. Among the advantages accrued by such a policy would be a true rapid reaction capability, and the ability to deploy in tandem with military personnel, justice officials and Corrections Canada officers.

A number of participants stressed the integrated nature of peace support operations, including judicial components, prisons etc, as well as policing.

CIDA

CIDA is taking steps to improve Canadian capacity for civilian deployment, and to provide a more coherent framework for civil - military cooperation. Currently the training, deployment and re-integration requirements for each deployment are managed individually. There is a greater need for training for civilian deployments.

One noteworthy CIDA initiative was the recent creation and funding of a liaison position in Eritrea. The consultant, a civilian based with the Canadian Forces battalion in Eritrea, provides CIDA with the information needed to better integrate its peacebuilding initiatives with pre-existing military operations, and to facilitate civil-military cooperation.

The experiment was considered a success by both CIDA and for the Department of National Defense (DND). Two challenges identified for future consideration are: to locate and select a consultant more quickly; and to establish with the consultant a more clearly defined set of objectives and responsibilities, in order that the consultant could operate more effectively within a military working environment.

DND

Canada has made a conditional commitment of up to 4,000 Canadian Forces personnel to the UN Standby Arrangements System (UNSAS). From this group, Canada has also earmarked a battle group for participation in SHIRBRIG, ready for a rapid deployment of up to six months in length in traditional (Chapter VI) peacekeeping activities.

There was discussion concerning possible deployment of SHIRBRIG under chapter seven mandates. Generally the UN is not deploying forces under chapter seven mandates. These are undertaken by "coalitions of the willing" and may or may not be authorized by the Security Council. Canada may support deployment under "semi-chapter seven" mandates (e.g. UN chapter six-and-a-half, or non-UN auspices).

At present, more than 3500 of the Canadian Forces' 12,000 deployable troops are engaged in peace operations, under both UN and NATO auspices. Although this number is lower than a peak of more than 4000 troops in 1999, it represents a considerable strain on the resources of the Canadian Forces. Considering that at any one time (at this level of commitment), approximately 2000 troops are preparing for deployment, 2000 are deployed, and 2000 are returning from theatre, the Canadian Forces faces a barely sustainable operational tempo - especially when operational and maintenance requirements for old equipment are also considered. Approximately 75% of Canadian troops deployed in peace support operations are serving under NATO command.

Although DND's "early in, early out" strategy is in part a response to this pressure, it was emphasized that "early in, early out" should not be confused with pre-defined time limits on Canadian commitments for military participation in peace operations. Instead, the concept is one which underscores Canada's determination to be among the first to deploy in peace operations, exploiting the short but critical window of opportunity in the first stages of a mission. It is in these early stages that the Canadian Forces' professionalism and experience can be put to the most effective use.

The difficulty in obtaining accurate information on DND expenditures on peace support operations was mentioned.

Two further initiatives were also touched upon. First, regarding standby lists, DND have folded both operational and headquarters personnel into a roster pre-approved for rapid deployment. Whether this list can be called into action in a particular instance depends on political approval from the government. Second, in the interest of establishing more effective working relationships with other government agencies, DND has created a liaison position within CIDA.

- Options and Initiatives -

Civil society participants at the meeting reviewed options for further engagement in the reform of peace operations. Discussion focused on (a) modalities and (b) thematic issues.

Modalities for involvement by NGOs might include reviving the dormant Working Group of the Canadian Peacebuilding Coordinating Committee; various listserv and other low-level networking mechanisms; linking with various international networks and institutes; sectorally dedicated networks, such as humanitarian agencies with ongoing relations with various international peace operations; and conferences or other dedicated discussion of various political questions (e.g. outcomes of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty; questions of legitimacy, standardization and accountability relating to the trend for peace operations to be run through non-UN organizations).

A range of thematic issues could be pursued, some within the framework of current Government of Canada priorities, and others which may have longer time horizons.

Some of these thematic issue areas include:

- Proposals for a rapid reaction police capability for Canada, including permanent funding and a core team of specialists;
- Establishing in Canada a central secretariat with the capacity to distill and consolidate critical information regarding imminent international emergencies, in order to facilitate rapid and cohesive decision-making by policy makers;
- Encourage wider discussion of the priority accorded to peace operations within Canadian foreign and defense policies;
- Support and encourage DFAIT's push to establish IMTFs as permanent features of peace operations;
- Support and encourage the development of standardized training programmes for participants in peace operations, civil and military, both at the national and international levels;
- Build upon national level mechanisms for locating qualified civilians for rapid deployment into peace operations;
- Promote better understanding of the relationship between the need for rule of law, good governance, humane public order, and a solid economic infrastructure;
- Promote the need for a standing multidimensional rapid reaction capability under UN auspices which can be deployed on a reliable basis for a variety of peacekeeping mission objectives.

- Appendix 1: List of Participants -

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UN Association in Canada, rapporteur

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Barbara Bedont
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From the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade:

Michel Duval, Deputy Permanent Representative of Canada to the UN;
Mark Glauser, Manager, Experts Deployment, Regional Security and Peacekeeping Division;
Patrick Ulric, Desk Officer, Experts Deployment, Regional Security and Peacekeeping
Division;
Vanessa Kent, Peacekeeping Desk Officer, Regional Security and Peacekeeping Division

From Department of National Defense:

Colonel Gaston Côté, Director, Directorate of Peacekeeping Policy;

From the RCMP:

Superintendent Jean St-Cyr, Officer in charge of Peacekeeping Operations
Corporal Gilles Brunet, responsible for peacekeeping operations

From CIDA:

Luc Duchesne, Senior Programme Officer, Peacebuilding Unit

Appendix 2 - Documents available at the meeting -

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