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The Need for Stability Police in Peace Operations

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www.effectivepeacekeeping.org

1705 N STREET NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20036
(202) 828-0110

A Partnership for Effective Peacekeeping (PEP) Publication

The PEP is a non-partisan policy working group that brings together the humanitarian, human rights, peace and security, think tank, and academic communities in support of greater peace operations capacity. The PEP promotes public policy solutions to improve national and international peacekeeping infrastructure, and works to build the political will to support such policies by: providing an open forum for discussion of peace operations issues; serving as an information resource for media and policymakers; and engaging in educational efforts that facilitate greater understanding of peace operations. The PEP does not exclusively support any one particular solution for the capacity problems that prevent effective peacekeeping operations. Rather, the PEP facilitates the exploration of all potential pragmatic and achievable solutions in a candid and 'outside the box' atmosphere.

Introduction

In the immediate aftermath of a military intervention or the collapse of a state, general lawlessness and looting invariably occurs. Military combat forces are neither appropriately trained or equipped to effectively deal with this problem, nor do most military commanders want the policing job. However, even if there is a legitimate and functioning indigenous police force, it can be easily overwhelmed by the well-armed former combatants or organized criminal actors that swiftly emerge in post-conflict situations.

This public security and safety gap must therefore be addressed by international civilian police deployed by the UN or by other agencies. Police officers are generally best suited from a training and experience standpoint to deal with criminal activity, refugee security, election security, and the monitoring and training of local police forces. However, to address the immediate post-combat issues such as widespread looting and violence, major civil disturbances, and the upsurge in organized crime and extremist activity, ordinary police forces can be augmented with the addition of stability police.

Stability Police

Stability police (also known as constabulary or gendarme police) in certain European countries are armed forces that have both military and police capabilities, and can therefore operate independently or in cooperation with military or other police forces in either a military or civilian capacity. The French Gendarmerie and the Italian Carabinieri are examples of this type of highly trained police force. Their primary function is the protection and well-being of the country and its citizens. In peace and stability operations, stability police forces can provide for public security after the military combat units have pulled back and before international civilian police are deployed and local law enforcement capabilities are restored.

The Need for Stability Police

In most post-conflict settings, two serious obstacles to restoring the rule of law point to the need for stability police. First, UN and other international policing missions are greatly weakened by the exceedingly long time it takes to deploy individual police officers from dozens of countries around the world. This problem is exacerbated by the uneven quality of civilian police from lesser developed countries, and the coordination and management problems caused by the wide range of policing cultures and traditions. Second, when the actions of potential spoilers to the peace (including warlords, armed thugs, and organized criminal networks) create a serious law and order challenge, the required response may fall outside the capabilities of either ordinary police or the military.

Police officers deployed to peace and stability operations are usually ordinary police officers, and even when armed are not equipped to deal with heavily armed and armored elements. Yet a traditional military response, which following established doctrine might involve the use of overwhelming force, is often not warranted and may even be counterproductive, because it could negatively impact local consent for the overall operation. Stability police are therefore useful, because they can respond to situations that would overwhelm ordinary police, but that do not require the massive show of force from the military.

Stability police deploy with the proper equipment, training, and procedures already developed for riot control, organized crime, and other specialized policing duties. In developed countries, they are usually well-trained, well-disciplined police units, comprised of police officers who speak the same language, and who can deploy rapidly with their own transport, communications, logistical support, and command structure. Stability police deployments may therefore be able to avoid some of the problems noted earlier that afflict ordinary police deployments to peace operations.

In the Balkans, particularly in Kosovo, the UN and NATO have successfully used stability police for special events security, border patrol, high risk arrests, election security, and the protection of VIPs, international judges and prosecutors, and others. The stability police units have proved critical to restoring law and order, combating organized crime, and responding to civil disturbances.

In Iraq, the failure to stop the looting that followed the successful military campaign caused damage that is still hindering coalition political and economic reconstruction efforts, a legacy that has contributed to the violence in parts of Iraq. Coalition military forces have also been accused of responding to civil protests in Iraq with excessive force, which has led to greater resentment of the coalition partners. Stability police can avoid these problems, because they can deploy alongside military forces to swiftly deal with immediate problems such as looting, and are specially trained to deal with civil disturbances and rioting and resolve them peacefully if possible.

Potential Issues to Using Stability Police

It is true that the use of police in certain situations may face obstacles. In many post-conflict societies the line between the military and the police may have become blurred, and the security forces may have been part of the conflict and the oppression of civilians. In addition, Spain, France and other European powers left behind constabulary police forces in many of their former colonies, just as the U.S. created constabulary police forces in various places in the Caribbean. Many of these police forces were subsequently perverted and misused by despotic regimes to consolidate and hold onto power. It is easy to see that intervening stability police forces might provoke the wrong perception in situations like those noted above, pointing among other things to the need for an effective public relations effort to properly explain the role of the international stability police component.

Another problem is the availability of stability police. In general, the UN and other organizations have found it difficult to find enough police officers to meet mission requirements. Stability police are in even shorter supply, because many countries, such as the U.S. and the Nordics, do not have these types of police forces. Developed countries that do have stability police forces tend to be reluctant to deploy them internationally. Developing countries have proved more willing, but the experience in Kosovo, where most UN stability police units were from such countries, illustrated the need for more training and better equipment. Programs such as the Global Peace Operations Initiative, a plan to train and equip up to 75,000 peacekeepers worldwide by 2010, includes a training facility in Italy for stability police, and may help increase capacity in this area.

Policy Implications for the United States

In most post-conflict situations there are situations that require a response falling between traditional policing and military combat. The U.S., which does not have a national police force, does not have stability police, either. Nevertheless, the U.S. is faced with a growing need for the capabilities that can be provided by stability police. In Afghanistan, Iraq, and now Haiti, the U.S. has acted to meet national security interests yet done so without all the tools necessary for success in the post-conflict environment.

Looking to the Future

The lack of global stability policing capacity for peace and stability operations can best be met in the short term by the stability police capacities found within many EU member states. Stability police forces in EU countries are generally regarded as highly professional and capable police organizations. In the long term, programs such as GPOI should improve the stability police capacities of other countries.

An additional step could be the establishment of a 1500 member stability police force, made up primarily of stability police from appropriate EU countries, for deployment to UN and other international peace and stability operations. This force could be organized under the auspices of the new EU Rapid Reaction Force (EURRF), or alternatively under the NATO Rapid Response Force. This force should be in addition to the 5000-plus EU police already identified for the EURRF.