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The Case for US Support for UN Peacekeeping

PEP BRIEFING NOTE

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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

From the U.S. perspective, UN peacekeeping operations offer U.S. policymakers a set of options between doing nothing and taking costly unilateral action in the face of destabilizing conflicts in regions of strategic interest to the U.S.

Accordingly, since 2003, the Bush Administration has supported a major increase in UN peacekeeping missions to help end brutal conflicts, support stability and transition to democratic change, and bring relief for hundreds of millions of people, including new operations in Lebanon, East Timor, Sudan, Haiti, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia, Burundi and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

This has increased the total personnel serving in 18 missions worldwide to over 100,000. More critically, it has raised the level of uniformed peacekeeping forces to over 80,000 worldwide, with the potential to exceed 100,000 given full deployment to Lebanon and Sudan/Darfur. This means the UN is second only to the U.S. in the number of deployed military forces.

UN Peacekeeping and U.S. National Security Interests

As one of the primary ways to respond to failed or failing states, UN peacekeeping operations meet U.S. national security needs. Military experts and national leaders from both parties have noted that failed states can pose a national security threat to the U.S. by becoming safe havens, bases of operation, and transit areas for the activities of organized criminal networks and international terrorist organizations.

As for the suggestion that UN peacekeeping missions can work against U.S. interests, this is false. The U.S., through its veto on the Security Council, can block any proposed peacekeeping operation that does not meet U.S. strategic interests.

While UN peacekeeping meets U.S. national security needs, these operations do not consume U.S. military resources. Very few U.S. personnel are involved with UN peace operations. As of December 2006 U.S. military observers, civilian police (CIVPOL) and military staff officers account for only 324 (or 0.40%) of the 80,368 UN peacekeepers worldwide.

Furthermore, as Commander-in-Chief the President never gives up his command authority over U.S. troops. When U.S. troops are involved in any sort of peacekeeping mission and when the risk of combat is high, command of U.S. forces remains in American hands. In the case of NATO peacekeeping missions, it is true that operational control may be given to a trusted military ally, such as a NATO member, but even in these cases overall command still ultimately rests with an American, the U.S. general serving as Supreme Commander of NATO forces.

UN Peacekeeping is Effective—and Cost Effective

Establishing a sustainable peace requires significant long-term commitment to restoring or establishing the rule of law, providing security, establishing good governance capacity, and rebuilding infrastructure. This commitment can be lengthy and costly, but is crucial for success. Sharing the burden through the UN is a good way to ease the high costs in dollars and human capital.

A 2005 RAND report suggests the UN is better suited for peacekeeping missions than unilateral U.S. action. The study compared 16 U.S. and UN

nation-building missions and found that of the “eight UN-led cases, seven are at peace. Of the eight U.S.-led cases, four are at peace; four are not—or not yet—at peace.”

A recent General Accounting office (GAO) study concluded that UN peacekeeping is eight times less expensive than funding a U.S. force (because the UN is half as expensive and the U.S. only pays a quarter of the costs). OMB just gave the Contributions for International Peacekeeping Activities (CIPA) account its highest (three star) rating under its Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), judging CIPA funds to be effective, achieving their stated goals, and linked to the State Department’s objectives.

The U.S. currently pays around 26% of the cost of UN peace operations. A successful UN peace operation is clearly a more cost effective option than unilateral action. Sharing costs and risks through UN peacekeeping operations is a sensible bargain that polls show a vast majority of Americans support.

Justification for U.S. Support for Funding UN Peace Operations

U.S. government officials have praised UN peacekeeping. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, testifying before the House SSJC Appropriations Subcommittee on March 9, 2005, said “[UN Peacekeeping] is much more cost effective than using American forces. And of course, America doesn't have the forces to do all of these peacekeeping missions, but somebody has to do them. And the United States has to pay its share of people doing them.”

Speaking before Senate Appropriators in early 2006, former Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld cited the UN operation in Haiti as “one example of the benefit of empowering partner nations,” noting that “[W]ithout the major help of other nations, it would have cost the U.S. taxpayers almost eight times as much in dollars, to say nothing of the added stress on our forces.”

Impact of UN Peacekeeping Funding Shortfalls

When the U.S. or other countries fail to pay or defer their peacekeeping bills the UN is forced to juggle funds from one account to another and adjust its bill-paying strategies. The UN will pay deadline sensitive bills, such as equipment, travel, and short-term logistical expenses, but defer payments to troop contributing nations. After the U.S. repaid its arrears to the UN under the Helms-Biden deal in 1998, for example, the UN finally reimbursed 14 to 15 countries for up to three years worth of deferred troop contributing costs.

Major troop contributing nations to the UN are Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Uruguay, Jordan, Ethiopia, Nepal, South Africa, Morocco, Ukraine, Argentina, and Poland. The chief problem with the failure to keep up with UN peacekeeping assessments is that it makes it harder and harder to get these nations to continue to serve as peacekeepers, especially in big missions with complex logistics and high costs.

Current outstanding dues for UN peacekeeping as of November 2006 are \$2.21 billion. Because of unpaid peacekeeping dues, the UN has recently been unable to fully reimburse troop contributing nations for the troops they have provided to UN peace operations around the world. Without U.S. funds, the UN may not be able to convince nations – already owed for their previous commitments – to contribute additional troops for a Darfur mission when that mission comes into force.

Conclusion

UN peacekeeping missions can only do what the UN Security Council authorizes them to do, and even authorized missions are totally dependent on the willingness of individual nations to contribute troops, equipment, and assessed financial obligations. The existing voluntary system of peacekeeping is inadequate to effectively address conflict and post-conflict situations.

For more information, please see the PEP website for reports and analysis.

Sources:

UN websites, UN Foundation fact sheets, Henry L. Stimson Center fact sheets