

Season of the Blue Helmets

On January 11, 2007, the UN Security Council called for the speedy deployment of a political mission to Nepal to monitor weapons caches and facilitate elections in the wake of the hard fought peace accord between the government and Maoist rebels. This action capped a period of unprecedented growth for the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. Over the last six months, the Security Council has tasked UN peacekeeping forces with maintaining a fragile peace in southern Lebanon, creating an environment for reconciliation in East Timor, and stopping the violence in Darfur. These three missions alone, if implemented in full, would increase the number of peacekeepers around the globe, already the world's second largest standing army, by 150 percent.

The creation of these new missions, and the difficult tasks entrusted to them, show the recognition of the international community of the importance of international peacekeeping. The major powers on the Security Council that have overseen this expansion clearly have faith in the UN's ability to heal countries torn apart by war. That confidence is deserved. Through years of working in diverse and hostile environments, the United Nations has become the global authority on peacekeeping and post-conflict reconstruction.

Yet while the demand for peacekeepers is growing, the resources allocated by member states to sustain these forces have not grown in proportion. During his most recent briefing of the UN budget committee, UN Comptroller Warren Sach reported that member states owed \$2.6 billion in arrearages to UN peacekeeping, over half the yearly budget. As a result, the United Nations is constantly forced to shift resources internally or even withhold payments to troop contributors because the very nations that authorize these new missions have not met their own financial obligations to fund them. Mr. Sach reports that over \$300 million is still owed to troop contributing nations. Arrearages to the UN peacekeeping account make it harder and harder to convince these nations to continue to send peacekeepers.

Clearly, an arrangement in which the countries that authorize new missions are unwilling to fully fund them is unsustainable. Without continued support for new and existing missions, the successful track-record of peacekeeping in recent years may be in jeopardy.

There are currently 18 peacekeeping missions deployed around the world, fielding over 97,000 troops, police, and military observers and civilian staff from 112 countries. Some of these missions, like the United Nations Troop Supervision Organization for the Sinai, have been around nearly as long as the UN itself. But most of the peacekeeping missions have been authorized since the end of the Cold War.

In the early 1990s, large missions were deployed to the Balkans. Then, after a lull, new missions were approved for Ethiopia/Eritrea and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and two political "trusteeships" were sent to East Timor and Kosovo in 1999 and 2000. In 2004 and 2005, the Security Council authorized five new operations in Burundi, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, and southern Sudan. The newest flurry of Council activity for Lebanon, East Timor, and Darfur constitutes what the Security Council Report identifies as the "fourth major surge" in UN peacekeeping since the end of the Cold War.

While some missions, like the recently deployed United Nations Force in Lebanon, have garnered significant press coverage, other UN missions in Congo, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, and elsewhere have gone less noticed, but have nonetheless made noteworthy contributions to the stability of those countries and their regions. In late November, with security assistance provided by the mostly Brazilian and Jordanian blue helmets, Haitians voted in long-delayed municipal and local elections with little disruption. Six months earlier, UN peacekeepers in the Congo – by far the largest peacekeeping opera-

tion on the planet ~ oversaw that country's first election in 40 years.

To call this a logistical accomplishment is an understatement; Congo is the size of Western Europe and has less than 300 miles of paved roads. Nonetheless, the UN mission there was able to register 25 million voters ~ some of whom had to be reached by canoe. In November, after a second run-off election, the Congolese Supreme Court certified Joseph Kabilla as the president-elect. Hours earlier, a contingent of Indian blue helmets fought back an assault on a major city in east Congo by militants loyal to a renegade general.

Haiti and Congo remain on the brink. But few would doubt that these countries have not made significant progress since the peacekeepers arrived. Perhaps the best recent example of the rehabilitative power of peacekeeping missions is Liberia, where 14,000 UN troops are stationed. After being ruled for years by an indicted war criminal, Charles Taylor, the UN mission in Liberia oversaw the election of Africa's first female head of state, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. Liberia is now seen as a beacon of hope for other war-torn countries in western Africa.

Critics have pointed out the failures of UN peacekeeping in the past. The Dutch UN Battalion ceding of the so-called "Safe-Haven" in Srebrenica in 1995 and the Belgian Peacekeepers' evacuation of Rwanda in 1994 rightly shook global confidence in UN peacekeeping, as do the allegations of sexual abuse by peacekeepers now. However, the bottom line is that UN peacekeeping, as a whole, provides an irreplaceable service to humanity, a service which could not be replicated by any other entity even if it chose to do so. And, in recent years, the United Nations has undertaken a massive effort to improve the management of peacekeeping forces and the way in which missions interact with local populations. Thanks in large part to a 2000 internal review of peacekeeping operations led by the longtime Algerian diplomat Lakdhar Brahimi, the United Nations has set in place permanent mechanisms to ensure oversight, accountability, and effectiveness of peacekeeping operations. And it has enacted a "zero-tolerance" policy with regard to sexual abuse and set up "conduct units" in every peacekeeping mission. It has learned from the tragic mistakes of the past and, in the words, of the New Republic's Peter Beinart, evolved into the "the foremost repository of peacekeeping expertise in the world." A 2005 RAND Corporation study confirms this. "The United Nations provides the most suitable institutional framework for most nation-building missions," the report concludes, "One with a comparatively low cost structure, a comparatively high success rate, and the greatest degree of international legitimacy." Indeed, the study also found that UN-led nation-building operations have a success rate far greater than unilateral nation-building efforts. That success is having a direct impact on the lives of nearly a billion people across the world. In 2005 a major international study, the Human Security Report, found a correlation between the expansion of UN peacekeeping operations and the considerable improvement of the global security climate from 1988 to 2001.

Confidence in peacekeeping is also reflected in the highest levels of American government. The White House Office of Management and Budget gives high marks to UN peacekeeping, judging it a cost-effective way of meeting State Department goals. The General Accountability Office recently confirmed this view with a detailed study comparing the UN's mission in Haiti to a hypothetical American deployment there. The report found that the UN mission in Haiti achieves its objectives while being eight times less expensive than the cost of deploying American forces.

Indeed, the true-extent of the cost-effectiveness of peacekeeping is little known. The United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations funds 18 missions around the world with an annual budget of only \$5 billion. In comparison, the Pentagon spends that amount on Operation Iraqi Freedom in one month. UN peacekeeping operations are relatively inexpensive largely because overhead costs are very low ~ around 7 percent. This is in part due to the low ratio of headquarter staff to troops overseas. Peacekeeping also keeps its costs down by relying on troops from developing nations, the majority

of which come from Southeast Asia. The UN pays the governments of troop contributing countries \$1,110 per soldier each month of deployment, which is far less than the cost of sending an American soldier overseas

From a major powers' perspective, the UN sends troops to global hotspots so they don't have to. Consider this: there are over 20,000 UN peacekeepers in Haiti and Liberia, two countries where U.S. marines have deployed in the last decade. In East Timor ~ which is just off the northeastern coast of Australia ~ peacekeepers are being readied to support a recently authorized mission. Were UN peacekeepers not be deployed to these places, Australia and the United States ~ already burdened by deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan ~ would either be forced to pick up the slack or let these unstable nations fall back into chaos, affecting regional and global stability.

The need for peacekeepers is clearly great, but the single largest source of their funding is in arrears. UN Peacekeeping is financed by dues that are assessed separately from the regular UN budget. The United States is currently assessed at 27 percent ~ the largest single amount of any country. But Congress enacted a 25 percent cap on expenditures to this account in 1999; if they do not lift the cap, it is impossible for the United States to pay its current dues, much less its arrearages.

The White House's FY 2008 budget request asked Congress to appropriate \$1.1 billion for UN peacekeeping, or about 24 percent of the UN's peacekeeping budget. This shortchanges real needs on the ground. Further, the request assumes that certain missions, like deployments in Burundi and Cyprus, will be terminated and that seven other missions will be significantly scaled back. Just the opposite is the case: with new missions to Lebanon, East Timor, and Darfur, the UN peacekeeping needs could jump by 40 percent, to \$8 billion. If no action is taken to increase US contributions to UN peacekeeping funds, American backlogs could approach \$1 billion in 2008.

If this trend is sustained, ongoing missions will suffer, and some of the newly proposed missions, such as Darfur, could starve before they ever get off the ground. With the United States, NATO, and other powers stretched by commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, the task of maintaining peace and security elsewhere has fallen to the United Nations. So far, the United Nations has risen to this challenge and is actively engaged in some of the world's seemingly most intractable conflicts. But success is not guaranteed. Unless the supply of resources needed to sustain UN peacekeeping can keep up with peacekeeping's growing demand, the future of these operations may be in doubt. With such a low cost and such great benefits, the United States and the rest of world could hardly afford not to meet these challenges.