

1996

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Recommended Citation

Ghia, Fabio (1996) "Set and Drift," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 49 : No. 3 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol49/iss3/9>

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SET AND DRIFT

Armed Intervention in UN Peacekeeping The Necessity for Change

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THE UN CHARTER, SIGNED IN SAN FRANCISCO on 26 June 1945, indicates the primary aim of the organization: "the maintenance of international peace and security, with full respect for the equality of rights and autonomy of all peoples." The decision-making body created toward this end was the Security Council, composed of fifteen members, five of which are permanent: the United States, the Soviet Union (now replaced by Russia), China, France, and the United Kingdom. It is the five permanent members who, in reality, take the measures necessary for peace and security, availing themselves of the Military Staff Committee and of armed forces from the states that from time to time agree to undertake various initiatives. The Security Council structure itself gives the five permanent members the major responsibility for the course of world events; even today, these nations exercise a non-negotiable veto.

In recent years, however, much has changed, and much more is in the process of changing. Equilibrium has disappeared, due to the collapse of the Soviet empire and with it the bipolar world structure. Many nations that had modeled

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Naval War College Review, Summer 1996, Vol. XLIX, No. 3

their social and economic development upon one or the other "pole" have had to face cruel realities, the twin evils of hunger and ignorance. To them have been added nationalism, ethnocentrism, and tribalism, all operating against volatile historical and religious backgrounds. One result has been that UN involvement, once aimed at maintaining the global strategic balance between the USSR and the U.S., today tends to be reserved for supporting principles of human rights and popular autonomy—the traditional monitoring and mediating role of peacekeepers. But the fratricidal conflicts that have inevitably occurred leave precious little space for basic human rights, despite the peacekeeping attempts of the United Nations. Accordingly, within the UN organization itself, one hears ever more frequently of the need to restore credibility and effectiveness to the military instrument, which today seems to be the only usable tool for confronting the terrible reality of war.

In recent years, worldwide opinion has taken note of the enormous difficulties the UN has experienced in pursuing "prospects for peace" in crisis or war zones. Despite the "new world order" declared by the United States after the successful UN operation in the Persian Gulf War, that same United Nations has had difficulty managing subsequent interventions and achieving political coordination; both problems are reflected in contingents sent to war zones, in which a few nations carry disproportionate burdens. Bosnia, Somalia, and Rwanda have demonstrated, in different ways, that traditional international peacekeeping initiatives are likely to be useless in the face of complex conflicts, especially ethno-religious ones—even for safeguarding basic human rights, let alone resolving the crises.

The general outlook hardly leads one to think that we are likely to escape from this situation in the near future. As a result, there is ever wider acceptance of a UN policy of *armed* intervention in the name of humanitarianism. Such operations must be distinguished from "wartime operations" as usually conceived, e.g., Korea, Vietnam, Kuwait. "Peace enforcement" involves deploying forces on the ground to restore, or create, the conditions necessary for humanitarian aid—an activity that is not only necessary to protect the civil population but is indispensable for reconciliation, dialogue, and reconstruction.

In connection with the differences between "war operations" and peacekeeping, or humanitarian operations, let us briefly contrast two UN operations, actions in which Italy participated and that had their problematic aspects.

Iraq: A Massive Intervention

An example of the first of the two kinds of operations took place as a result of a dispute between Iraq and Kuwait. When Iraq invaded Kuwait, the Security Council accused it of having acted against the rights and interests not only of

Kuwait but also of the international community (Resolution 660) and of having refused the peace terms offered through international channels. From the beginning of the conflict, Iraq was considered by the international community to be the aggressor. In the successive Security Council resolutions, one can see on one hand the Council's firm intention to bring about the withdrawal of Iraqi troops from Kuwaiti soil and, on the other, the Council's determination to highlight Iraq as the violator of international peace. This firm attitude led to Resolution 678 of 29 November 1990 authorizing armed intervention against Iraq by the members of an international coalition.

The course of the war, from an organizational point of view, is not the subject of this essay. It suffices to say that certain actions were taken, by the United States especially, that leave no doubt as to what sort of operation was being carried out. First, there was a press blackout on the movement of military vehicles and personnel; second, there was censorship with respect to losses on either side; and finally, the United States alone deployed into the operational area a total of 450,000 troops, including seventy thousand Marines, and a seemingly infinite number of vehicles and high-technology weapons suitable for the most powerful "surgical" actions. The other states involved likewise made considerable contributions to the multinational force. In substance, then, this was a real war, conducted by a coalition of states against Iraq, legitimized at the international level by the will of the United Nations.

Somalia: A New Type of Intervention

What happened in Somalia, the second UN operation we will analyze here, is important from the viewpoint of UN intervention and also, for Italy, at the national level. For the United Nations, it represented the first military intervention since the end of the Cold War. For Italians the operation in Somalia, with its deployment to a country more than 3,500 miles away, involved the first sizeable ground contingent sent outside the nation's borders since the end of the Second World War. Let us look at both aspects.

At the end of 1992 Somalia was in complete turmoil, totally destroyed by civil war and devastated by a terrible famine that was causing the death of over two thousand people a day. The Security Council approved first the dispatch of fifty observers to the capital, Mogadishu. On 3 December 1992 it agreed, in Resolution 794, to increase the number to 3,500, with the aim of establishing as soon as possible the security conditions necessary for humanitarian aid. On the 9th, while the first American troops were disembarking at Mogadishu, Italy decided to participate in the implementation of Resolution 794. By the end of January 1993 its contingent had reached a total of 1,400 men on the ground,

with another thousand in the naval force operating along the southeastern coast of Somalia.

It is to be noted that during this entire phase, the various national contingents of the multinational force (which numbered in all about twenty-eight thousand) took their orders from individual national governments, not from the United Nations. Only in May 1993, when the Italian naval component began to return home, did the multinational force assume an at least theoretically unified command structure, UNOSOM II—which proved in practice suitable only for coordinating humanitarian aid.

The second part of the mission, which ended on 4 March 1994 with the complete withdrawal of all UN contingents, involved thirty thousand men from the armed forces of thirteen nations, of every continent, from Argentina to Zimbabwe. This phase highlighted, among other problems, an excessive disparity in the preparation of the various contingents for operations of this type.

In Somalia, despite the inevitable complications, for the first time the United Nations put in motion an operation in which can be found elements of all possible doctrines of intervention:

- Peace-making, i.e., creating a state of peace, with the arrival of the multinational force and the disarming of the warring factions;
- Peacekeeping, i.e., maintaining the state of peace, with the positioning of UN troop garrisons in areas of vital importance for the humanitarian operation; and,
- Nation-building, i.e., reconstruction of the state, through impressive, if in this case ultimately inadequate, diplomatic action.

In this process the Italian contingent, it can be said, made an impression on the world for its professionalism and its high standard of activity in humanitarian operations. In fact, it assumed a primary role, both in that it was numerically second only to the force from the United States and, most of all, in view of its efficient pacification of the warring factions. Certainly there was no lack of difficulties, but the majority of them were resolved through intuition and creativity that are, we like to think, characteristically Italian.

Notwithstanding, a fundamental problem arose: a disagreement as to the “force” sanctioned by the United Nations mandate. The divergent interpretations closely reflected differences in the doctrines of the contingents involved. In the event, two completely different ways of acting emerged: the American one, with its large military forces conducting “surgical” actions, and the Italian one, which attempted to achieve peace through humanitarian efforts and dialogue. The Italian side always favored practical aid and mediation, convinced that where the factions were already substantially observing a cease-fire, peaceful conditions could be attained more effectively by meeting the needs of human survival rather than by applying massive force.

This is not the place for closely examining which of these would have been the best type of intervention in Somalia. It is enough to say here that the idea of a useful and unified doctrine needs wide discussion in the UN community.

There was also, however, a second basic problem, the effects of which were even more keenly felt in Somalia: the lack of institutional points of reference. Somalia was in a complete state of anarchy, which produced and was reinforced by hunger, famine, and a general sense of abandonment and despair that led each individual to struggle with his neighbor. There were, accordingly, no laws to which to appeal; Somalia was, in effect, a country without law. This situation exacerbated the widespread problems of banditry and disregard for human rights and dignity. Common criminals, members of armed gangs, and mobs who stoned a woman could be arrested, but there were no public organs to deal with their crimes.

Neither the police nor the judiciary existed any more. These two hinges of communal life had been completely wiped out by the violence that had brought the country to its state of misery and desperation. The Italian contingent attempted to reform the police corps in Mogadishu, but, due to the absence of institutional structures, especially judicial ones, the effort failed miserably.

It appears likely that an armed force intervening in a civil war will find it impossible to deal with common crime. This inability will provoke an escalation of violence among the civilian population, to the detriment of faith in and respect for the fundamental rules of communal life, making the nation progressively less governable. By March 1994, when the operation in Somalia ended, sixteen Italians had lost their lives: twelve soldiers, a Red Cross worker, and three journalists. All were victims of Somalian despair leading to barbarity; all were victims of anonymous killers.

Although a durable peace—the principal aim of the United Nations—was not achieved, and despite the sad loss of life, the value in humanitarian terms of the multinational intervention is not to be underrated. It is enough to state that the operation left the country in a condition far different from when it began, when two thousand people, many of them children, were dying every day. But it is appropriate to ask, what may be learned from this second kind of intervention, so different from the first, earlier one?

From the Italian point of view, its national contingent having proven itself fully up to the job, the major consideration must necessarily be of the UN itself. Several points require examination. First, in UN interventions both military and humanitarian aspects interact; if the Somalian experience offers a lesson, it is that their relative importance is a serious matter. Hence, a decision must be made whether the mission is primarily humanitarian or priority is to be given to "the war" as the primary means of pacification. In the latter case, the enemy must be

identified and defeated; but in the former, quite different matters must be examined.

Second, with regard to the intervention forces themselves, and in view of the different cultures from which those components are drawn, serious consideration must be given to a single doctrine and unified command structure. This should be under the UN aegis—if, indeed, it is possible at all.

Third, armed humanitarian operations are likely to fail if the institutional infrastructure is not restored, even on an emergency and provisional basis, to safeguard human rights and promote a sense of mutual trust among the people. In anarchic situations, force cannot resolve major social problems; at best it can create a temporary shelter under which civil society and institutions may be restored.

These issues require a change in approach to armed intervention, a change of mentality that can be achieved only if the system can take due account of training and cultural values. I am convinced that to achieve common aims at the international level, there is no alternative to dialogue, one built on deepening mutual understanding and a common search for solutions. The following, in descending order of facility, would contribute to this aim:

- A UN research and study center on armed intervention, where doctrine of both military and judicial-administrative natures could be developed and international personnel could be trained;
- An associated corps of jurists of worldwide reputation, with specific judicial powers, to intervene directly in operational areas to safeguard human rights and provide advice on rebuilding a nation's institutions; and,
- A unified UN military headquarters for the operational direction of armed interventions in crises.

Taking such an approach would be a long road to travel, and one full of pitfalls, not least because it involves both national and international organizations. These bodies so far have acted without coordination and sometimes entirely independently, but not always very successfully. I, for now, will content myself with having planted a seed, one that might sprout and develop responsibly, giving hope of a better future for human rights and the dignity of man.

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