

1994

## The Argentine Navy and United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations in the Gulf of Fonseca

Juan Carlos Neves

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Neves, Juan Carlos (1994) "The Argentine Navy and United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations in the Gulf of Fonseca," *Naval War College Review*. Vol. 47 : No. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol47/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

# The Argentine Navy and United Nations Peace-Keeping Operations in the Gulf of Fonseca

---

Commander Juan Carlos Neves, Argentine Navy

**P**EACE-KEEPING OPERATIONS ARE NOW one of the most important activities of the United Nations. Peace-keeping operations are not new; however, while only thirteen were conducted by the U.N. between 1945 and 1987, the same number was carried out between 1988 and January 1992. In fact, of the \$8.3 billion that has been spent by the U.N. on peace-keeping operations through January 1992, about \$3 billion has been committed in the last twelve-month period alone.<sup>1</sup>

The growth of this U.N. activity is a direct consequence of the international organization's more influential role since the end of the Cold War. It is also a result of the end of hostility between the five powers with veto rights on the United Nations Security Council. In fact, whereas 279 decisions of the Security Council have been vetoed since the creation of the U.N. in 1945, since 31 May 1990 no vetoes have been recorded.<sup>2</sup> The U.N. has been allowed to develop a broad spectrum of operations in defense of peace and stability.

---

Commander Neves, commanding officer of the destroyer ARA *Almirante Brown*, was assigned to the U.S. Naval War College from 1991 to 1993, first as a Naval Command College student and then as the Argentine Navy Research Fellow in the Center for Naval Warfare Studies. Previously he had commanded the fast patrol boat ARA *Intrepida* and served several tours in surface ships including an aircraft carrier, cruisers, destroyers, and corvettes. He saw active service during the Malvinas/Falklands War aboard the destroyer ARA *Seguí*. Commander Neves holds a master's degree in international relations from Belgrano University, Buenos Aires, and a master's degree in management science from Salve Regina College, Newport, R.I.

Due to restrictions imposed by United Nations classification rules, information known to military observers by reason of their specific work is not discussed in this article. Its contents reflect the author's personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the U.S. Naval War College or the Argentine Navy.

The author wishes to express his appreciation to Commander Harry Phillips, USN, of the Center for Naval Warfare Studies for valuable assistance in an earlier draft of this article.

While there are other important U.N. procedures designed to seek international peace, such as preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, and post-conflict peace-building, this article focuses only on peace-keeping. Peace-keeping is characterized as "the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well. Peace-keeping is a technique that expands the possibilities for both the prevention of conflict and the making of peace."<sup>3</sup> Although the concept of peace-keeping is still in the evolutionary stage, it is important to point out some of its definite characteristics that will help in understanding the actions developed for the Gulf of Fonseca.

First, peace-keeping operations require the consent of all the involved parties. They are significantly different from enforcement measures allowed under Chapter VII of the U.N. Charter, and the differences have obvious implications for the operational arena. Second, peace-keeping operations are executed with full respect for national sovereignty and the necessity for non-interference in internal affairs of U.N. member states.<sup>4</sup> Finally, it is necessary to keep in mind that peace-keeping operations are provisory, actions carried out to attempt to stop or prevent a conflict; final settlements must be reached through political agreements amongst the parties involved, a favorable climate having been created by such operations.

In the procedural field, peace-keeping operations also have other features that commend them. They are always executed under the control of the U.N. Security Council, through the office of the Secretary-General; they are generally not under the command of countries from the immediate operational area, nor are they generally under the independent national command of the country to whom the participating forces belong.<sup>5</sup> The U.N. requires that forces employed in peace-keeping be from one or more member states, which provide them on a voluntary basis. Once forces are committed, they act under the U.N. flag.

Peace-keeping operations present an unavoidable degree of risk. Through January 1992, over eight hundred personnel from forty-three countries have died in peace-keeping operations serving under the flag of the U.N.<sup>6</sup> This is an important point to keep in mind when unarmed forces are deployed into conflict areas. Finally, these operations are costly to the United Nations in financial terms. Some support is provided by the host countries, but the cost of peace-keeping operations (including translation services, personnel allowances, logistic peace-keeping, etc.) is borne by the U.N. and represents a real constraint for the start-up and maintenance of operations.

Until 1990, peace-keeping operations were carried out by only land and aviation assets. The U.N. has acquired much experience and background in the deployment of these kinds of forces. This said, the deployment of naval forces,

## 42 Naval War College Review

as was required by the unique geography of Central America, presented new challenges to U.N. peace-keeping operations.



### Historical Background of the Peace-keeping Operation in Central America

In the early eighties, Central America represented a typical Cold War scenario wherein the leftist and rightist governments and guerrilla groups fought for power and control with the direct or indirect support of both superpowers. Old border disputes and mistrust among the regional actors added further instability to an already difficult situation.

There were two main issues in Central America at the time. On one hand, the leftist revolutionary governments in Cuba and Nicaragua, supported by the Soviet Union, were actively supplying insurrectional groups in Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador.<sup>7</sup> In El Salvador, the guerrilla forces of the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (FMLN) had reached a level of power capable of seriously challenging the control of the constitutional government. On the other hand, an insurrectional group known as the Nicaraguan Resistance Fighters, or "Contras," fought the leftist Nicaraguan government, acting from Honduran territory with the declared support of the United States.

The United States, while supporting the governments of El Salvador and Honduras, harassed the Nicaraguan “Sandinista” revolutionary government in many different ways.

Completing the scenario, the three primary regional actors (Nicaragua, Honduras, and El Salvador) all share maritime frontage on the Gulf of Fonseca (see maps). This arm of the ocean had been an area of dispute over fishery resources, islands, and maritime boundaries that seriously affected the relationship among the three small regional navies. In the Cold War context, the Gulf of Fonseca served as a supply line of communication over which the leftist Nicaraguan Sandinista forces provisioned the Salvadoran FMLN guerrillas. The word that best describes the regional situation at the time is “volatile”—volatile because of the multiple factors capable of provoking an explosion of violence and instability.

In January 1983, the foreign ministers of four Latin American countries with interest in the area (Colombia, Mexico, Panama, and Venezuela) met on the Panamanian island of Contadora to look for a solution to the worsening Central American situation. These countries signed in July 1983 the “Declaration of Cancún about Central American Peace” and organized themselves as the “Contadora Group” to advocate peace and development in the region. In August 1985, four South American countries—Argentina, Brazil, Peru, and Uruguay—organized themselves as the “Support Group to Contadora” in an attempt to demonstrate the increasing concern and interest generated by the Central American conflict in the whole of the Western Hemisphere. At the time, the risks of an open war among the Central American countries, or of direct foreign intervention in the region, were the roots of this concern.

In August 1987, encouraged by the measure of goodwill generated by the Contadora Group and the Support Group, and convinced that continuation of the crisis was not acceptable, the presidents of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica met in Guatemala City and took a transcendent step by signing an agreement known as “Esquipulas II.” Esquipulas II established a framework for a definitive solution based on the principles of dialogue between opposing parties, amnesty, reconciliation, and democratization. Furthermore, and directly related to the subject of this article, Point Five of the agreement urged all parties to dedicate themselves to the cessation of aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements operating in the region; Point Six committed all five signatories not to allow the use of their territory for actions intended to disrupt another Central American government.<sup>8</sup> It is obvious that the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran presidents did not have uppermost in their minds the same insurrectional movements, nor were they referring to the same territories when agreeing to these articles; while one was thinking of the Nicaraguan Resistance acting from Honduras, the other had in mind the FMLN

#### 44 Naval War College Review

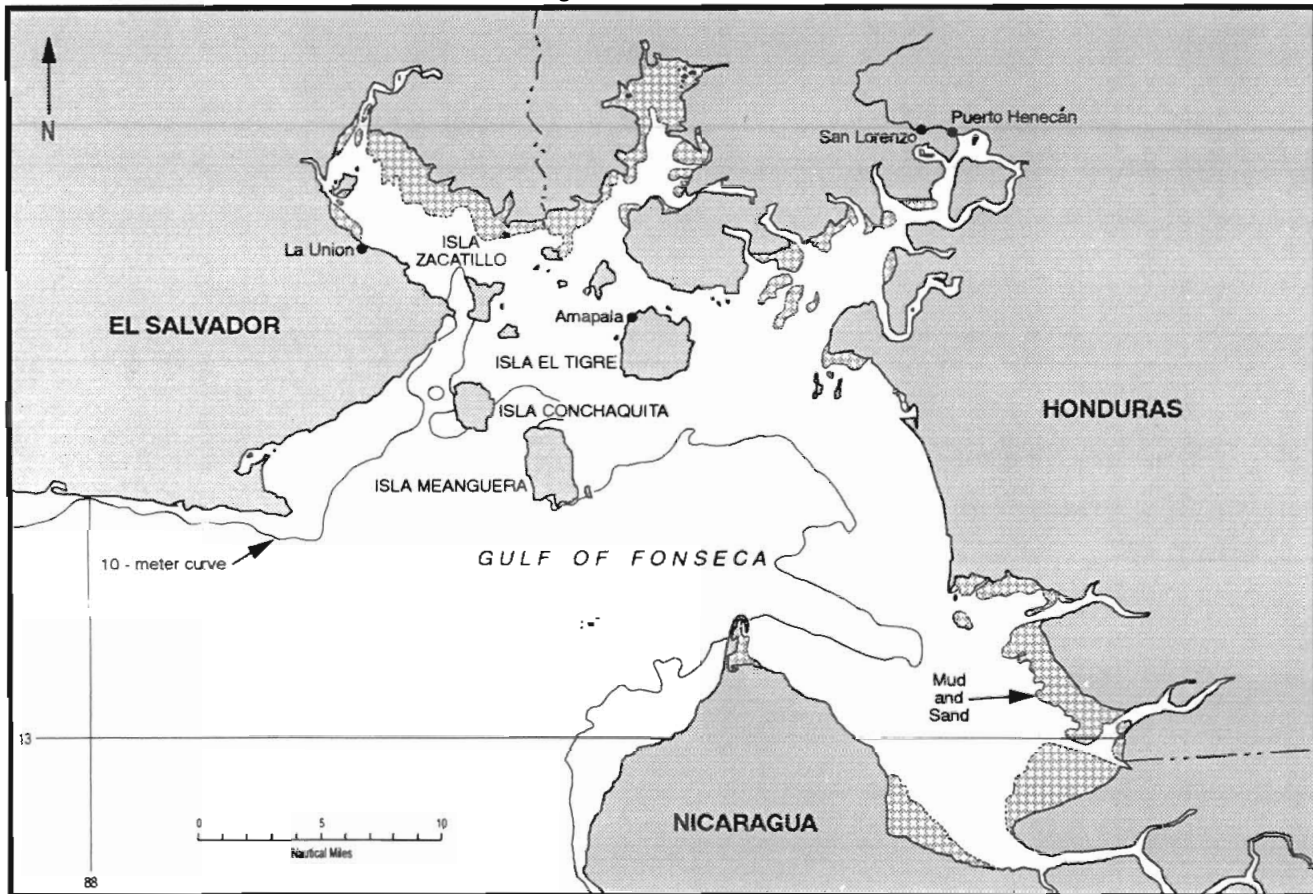
supported from Nicaragua. All, however, shared the need to stop hostilities in their respective countries, and all were ready to begin taking the steps necessary to carry out their commitments. Proof of this willingness was Point Ten of the Esquipulas II agreement, which called for the creation of an international commission to verify and follow up on the commitments agreed to. This clause was to be the seed of the future peace-keeping operations.<sup>9</sup>

Despite all the goodwill, intentions, and agreements, the situation in the region continued to be volatile throughout 1987 and into 1988. With the increasing thaw in the Cold War, however, the superpowers displayed proportionately less interest in supporting insurrectional movements in Central America. This trend, in turn, facilitated increasing United Nations involvement in the region and offered an opportunity for progress in the peace process.

In November 1988, the ministers of foreign affairs of the five Esquipulas II signatories addressed a letter to the U.N. Secretary-General asking for an impartial way to conduct on-site verification of points Five and Six of the agreement (referring to cessation of aid to insurrectionist movements and non-use of territory of one state to attack others). The response to this request in January 1989 presented the parties with a variety of peace-keeping operations options and outlined the principles and procedures of each. The U.N. reply pointed out the difficulties that the terrain presented for observers; it also stressed the necessity that all parties involved, even irregular forces and insurrectionist groups, must accept U.N. conditions prior to the commencement of any such operations.<sup>10</sup>

It took about six months and many meetings of all concerned to remove the obstacles to full acceptance of an international peace-keeping operation. Meanwhile, it became plain that the problem of Central America was unmanageable without external help. Finally, in August 1989, the Tela Declaration, signed in Honduras by Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua, formalized the requirement for an international peace-keeping force to be dispatched to Honduran territory.<sup>11</sup> The Tela Declaration also presented a joint plan for the voluntary demobilization, repatriation, or relocation of members of the Nicaraguan Resistance in Nicaragua or other countries and appealed to the FMLN to halt its military activities in order to put an end to hostilities in El Salvador. The agreement allowed the U.N. Security Council to adopt Resolution 644/89 on 7 November 1989, creating the United Nations Observer Group in Central America, or Grupo de Observadores de las Naciones Unidas en Centroamérica—ONUCA.

The resolution incorporated the substance of a report of the Secretary-General dated 11 October 1989. The report addressed the mandate, required capacities, and specifics of the command and organization of the U.N. force. The Security Council's mandate was to conduct on-site verification of the



Jerry Lamothe

cessation of aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements, and the non-use of the territory of one State for attacks on other States.<sup>12</sup> The ONUCA forces were to be capable of: monitoring, on a regular basis, areas reported to be harbor bases and camps of irregular forces and insurrectionist movements; monitoring land, sea, and air borders on a regular basis; investigating immediately any complaint received from one of the five governments of alleged violations relating to the cessation of assistance and non-use of territory.<sup>13</sup> As for command arrangements, the report established that ONUCA "should be under the command of the United Nations, vested in the Secretary-General, under the authority of the Security Council."<sup>14</sup>

The Secretary General's report also pointed out that the combination of static observation posts and patrols by foot, vehicle, and aircraft that was usual in other U.N. peace-keeping operations was not appropriate in the Central American region due to characteristics of the terrain. It proposed instead mobile teams of military observers having at their disposal helicopters, vehicles, and seagoing vessels as necessary to accomplish their mission. This was the first mention of the need for naval platforms; the report then went on to point out that the mobile teams would carry out regular patrols "by vehicle, by helicopter and, in the Gulf of Fonseca and certain other coastal areas and rivers, by patrol boats and light speedboats."<sup>15</sup>

The initial ONUCA organization was outlined in the report as follows: a headquarters located in Tegucigalpa, Honduras; a liaison office in each of the capitals of the five Tela Declaration countries; thirty-three verification centers, each manned by a mobile team of military observers; a naval unit consisting of about eight vessels, to be based at La Union, El Salvador; and an air wing comprising one fixed-wing aircraft and twelve helicopters. The personnel required included 260 Military Observers, about 115 aircrew and support personnel for fixed-wing aircraft and helicopters, around fifty naval crewmembers and support personnel, up to fourteen medical specialists, about 104 members of the U.N. international staff, and some eighty-two locally recruited civilians. ONUCA would involve an interesting combination of ground, aerial, and naval assets and about 625 personnel.<sup>16</sup>

There were other important features in the report as well. First, the military observers of ONUCA would not be armed. This basic requirement forced the U.N. to look for cooperation from the irregular forces and insurrectionist movements. These contacts would be informal and would in no way imply recognition of any such group. However, it was clear that ONUCA's ability to carry out its mandate would depend to a large extent on such cooperation. In exceptional cases, an armed escort would be requested from the regional governments to protect ONUCA personnel during the exercise of their functions. Second, all the means of transport required to carry out ONUCA's



mandate, including fast patrol boats, would have distinctive United Nations colors and markings. Finally, ONUCA would be deployed in four phases for a period of six months. The naval vessels would be incorporated during the second phase, meant to begin no later than four weeks after the adoption of the resolution.

The characteristics of ONUCA and of its environment, mandate, and diversity of assets meant that this would be an ambitious and complex peace-keeping operation. The deployment of the military observers and the aviation element was accomplished according to the four-phase plan. When the Secretary-General recommended the use of naval units in the Gulf of Fonseca, he followed the advice of the U.N. military staff in order to reach the best technical solution for the accomplishment of ONUCA's mission. But the use of ships under U.N. command for the first time in a peace-keeping operation in the history of the organization confronted it with complications that had never before been experienced. The first of such complications was in obtaining the ships themselves, as can be seen in the following.

ONUCA's mandate was established in November 1989 for a six-month period. The mandate was extended four times—in May 1990, November 1990, May 1991, and November 1991—for similar time frames. During the first period, the mandate was also *enlarged* two times, i.e., new tasks were added to the original mission.

At the end of the first period, on 27 April 1990, the Secretary-General issued a report of ONUCA activity for the first six months of its mandate and recommended to the Security Council that the mandate be extended for an additional six months.<sup>17</sup> The U.N. Security Council subsequently approved the extension in Resolution 654/90.

The best piece of news during this period occurred on 25 February 1990, when the national election in Nicaragua facilitated the beginning of voluntary demobilization of the members of the Nicaraguan Resistance. ONUCA's mandate was accordingly enlarged—by Resolution 650/90, to monitor the demobilization process; and by Resolution 653/90, to monitor the cease-fire and the separation of forces. The deployment of the military observers and the aviation element had been accomplished according to the four-phase plan.

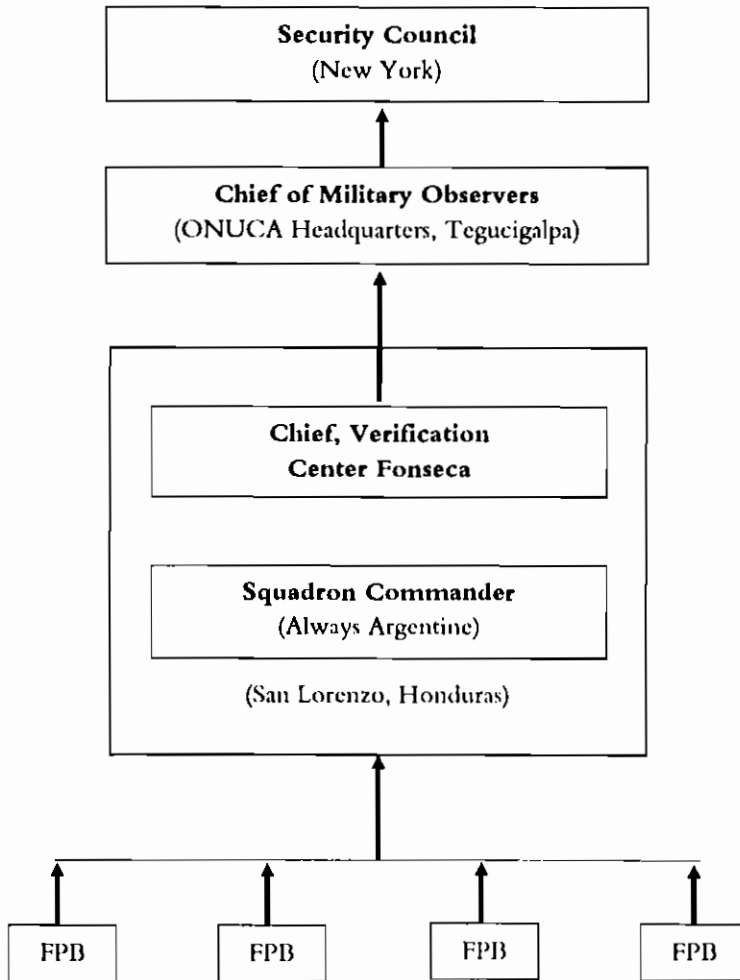
Not all the news was good, however. First, the FMLN continued its military activity despite the promise of talks between the government of El Salvador and the insurrectionist movement. Second, by February 1990 difficulties had arisen in obtaining the fast patrol boats necessary to complete ONUCA's responsibilities. In the words of the U.N. Secretary-General, Javier Perez de Cuellar, "It proved unexpectedly difficult to find a Member State able to supply the four fast patrol boats, together with their crews, required for patrolling the Gulf of

Fonseca.”<sup>18</sup> However, the Secretary-General was to find a solution to the problem in the assistance rendered by Argentina.

### Incorporating Naval Units in the Peace-Keeping Operations

In February, the Under Secretary-General established informal contact with the U.N. Argentine Mission in New York, requesting Argentina provide four fast patrol boats (FPBs) to be used as the naval element of ONUCA. The countries that had originally agreed to provide them were unable to do so. In less than two weeks, the Argentine government accepted the request and offered for the ONUCA mission four Israeli-built *Dabur*-class fast patrol boats.<sup>19</sup> The quick Argentine response was the result of a confluence of favorable political and military factors. First, the Argentine government had enthusiastically embraced the idea of a “New World Order” based on the decisive role of the United Nations in resolving international conflicts. Thus the U.N. request offered Argentina an opportunity to begin to change its traditional policy of non-involvement in foreign conflicts and to show a clear Argentine commitment to the New World Order ideal. Secondly, Argentina had always been interested in the Central American conflict and had been a member of the “Support Group to Contadora” since 1985. Argentina’s presence in Central America was consistent with its previous efforts to work toward peaceful and regional solutions to conflicts in the Western Hemisphere. Thirdly, in a time of budgetary constraint, the Argentine Navy considered its participation a good opportunity to improve its training, readiness, and crew experience without incurring additional cost to itself (since the operation would be paid for by the U.N.). Furthermore, the operation seemed useful for demonstrating once again the broad field of action that a navy can perform in support of national policies in the international arena. Finally, it is necessary to point out that thanks to the 1984 treaty on the Beagle Channel mediated by Pope John Paul II between Argentina and Chile, the situation in southern Argentina (where the FPBs had usually been employed) was stable enough to allow redeployment of the ships without risk.

These first satisfactory contacts between the U.N. and Argentina, which were the expression of common political objectives, were followed by a long period of discussion and agreements as practical problems requiring resolution surfaced. Some of these problems arose when U.N. regulations, devised for managing land-based and aviation assets, were applied to ships. Others were specific issues resulting from the deployment of naval units in an alien environment far from their support bases. Finally, lack of previous experience in using ships in peace-keeping operations created new situations that required original solutions and flexible responses.




---

**Chain of Command**

---

During March 1990, two Argentine Navy officers with broad experience in the Argentine Fast Patrol Boat Division travelled to the ONUCA mission area to study the environmental and operational conditions the naval units would face.<sup>20</sup> This trip and subsequent extensive correspondence between U.N. and Argentine representatives led to the agreements that are discussed below. The presentation is not chronological but by subject; despite some inevitable overlap, this approach provides a better understanding of each issue.

**Command.** Among the first matters discussed were command responsibilities and the chain of command. It was clear from the beginning that in accordance with Security Council Resolution 644/89 the naval group would be under U.N. command and authority. This decision was implemented in the following way (see figure).

Each FPB had its Argentine crew and commanding officer who had full responsibility for their own navigational and operational safety. Commanding officers would, moreover, assist U.N. Military Observers in their observational tasks. The four FPBs were under the command of a squadron commander appointed by the Argentine Navy, with headquarters at San Lorenzo, Honduras. This commander had full command responsibility for the FPBs, for the squadron's readiness, and for organizational and administrative matters. The squadron commander would report directly to the U.N.-appointed Chief of Verification Center San Lorenzo (later renamed Verification Center Fonseca). This officer was responsible for all activities of the Verification Center, including the operations of the FPBs and the actions of its U.N. Military Observers (UNMOs). The Center was located close to the squadron's base of operations at Puerto Heneacán, Honduras. The UNMOs had the task of routine observation and the additional duty of staffing the Verification Center. Finally, the Chief of the Verification Center came under the direct authority of the U.N.-appointed Chief of Military Observers of ONUCA, with headquarters located in the Honduran capital, Tegucigalpa. This officer was the highest authority in the field and reported to the U.N. Security Council through the Secretary-General.

In 1991 the U.N. requested that a senior Argentine Navy officer be appointed as Chief of Verification Center Fonseca, and in November 1991 another Argentine naval officer, in the grade of commander, was included in the headquarters staff. These appointments were a recognition of the professional capabilities of Argentine naval officers during the peace-keeping operations and of the outstanding job they had performed, but the additions did not change the operational chain of command, which remained as above until ONUCA's dissolution.

To complete the picture, it is necessary to mention that the squadron commander came under the authority of the Argentine Chief of Naval Operations for deployment and recall of ships and personnel. Additionally, the squadron commander addressed all logistical requirements and regular reports through the Argentine naval attaché in Washington, D.C.

**Symbols, Color, and Markings.** Another matter receiving attention and discussion was the way the national flag and the U.N. flag should be displayed by a ship operating under U.N. authority. From the Argentine point of view, the use of both flags (national and U.N.) was an acceptable solution. However, the *United Nations Flags Code and Regulations* establishes specific rules that cannot be

ignored. According to the Code, "On no account may any flag displayed with the United Nations Flag be displayed on a higher level than the United Nations Flag and on no account may any flag so displayed with the United Nations Flag be larger than the United Nations Flag."<sup>21</sup> Hence, U.N. legal advisors insisted that the U.N. flag should be the same size or larger than the ship's own ensign and should fly at all times from the top of the mainmast. Furthermore, they advised that should the U.N. flag be flown during hours of darkness, it should be illuminated so as to be clearly visible. The final settlement was that the FPBs would fly the U.N. flag as required and would display the Argentine national ensign on the flagstaff at the stern.

Another issue, more difficult of practical solution, was that of vessel color and markings. The United Nations requires that any ship operating under its authority be painted white. Moreover, the words "UNITED NATIONS" are to be painted on both sides of the ship in black or dark blue letters, and the abbreviation "U.N." displayed on front and rear surfaces of the hull and superstructure. All lettering should be as large as possible but in proportion to the area wherein located. Finally, United Nations logos are to be provided and fitted in visible parts of the ships. Implementation of these requirements for the Argentine FPBs was not very complicated, due to the vessels' small size. However, it did cost the U.N. about \$20,000 (U.S.) to paint the ships to U.N. specifications and a similar amount to return them to their original colors at the end of the operation. The ships were duly painted before arriving in the mission area.

The issue of color and markings of ships operating under U.N. control could become a major problem, depending on the size of the vessel. To paint and stencil a larger ship, such as a destroyer or frigate, according to U.N. rules could be expensive and time-consuming. Moreover, modern ships use paints with specific technical requirements that may not be available in the color white.

Now, it follows that, should it become desirable to employ a capital ship, such as a cruiser or an aircraft carrier, in the service of the United Nations, painting could become quite expensive and could entail significant delay in the execution of a peace-keeping operation. It is appropriate, then, to suggest that the U.N. should consider accepting more flexible rules permitting the partial painting of large ships, such as painting only the hull or designated superstructure areas. In any case, the issue of identification markings requires reexamination if the U.N. expects to use large ships in future peace-keeping operations.

***Weapons and Rules of Engagement.*** This matter involved the most sensitive issues raised in the preliminary agreements. The ONUCA mandate from the Security Council was for an unarmed peace-keeping operation; consequently,

one of the first and clearest U.N. requirements was to dismantle all weapons aboard the FPBs.

Sending unarmed surface combatants close to the coast in a conflict area is not a satisfactory option for any navy, even if such vessels are identified as United Nations units. However, the U.N. absolutely insisted on this point, recalling that the mission imposed was one of patrolling, observing, and reporting, a mission that did not require weapons; that the FPBs did not have the right to stop or inspect ship traffic; and that the Security Council mandate could not be altered under any circumstances. An Argentine proposal to keep some dismantled weapons aboard for the purpose of self-defense was also refused. In the end, all weapons, the two 20mm and two 12.7mm guns, were off-loaded.

At this point, it is necessary to reflect on the implications this requirement has for the use of larger ships for peace-keeping operations (which generally do not require the use of force, as opposed to peace-enforcement operations). Once again, it was the FPBs' small size that made it possible to dismantle the weapons without major practical difficulties. However, the same requirement applied to a destroyer or frigate could be almost unaffordable. Dismantling a large gun, with or without its armored mount, is costly, complex, and time-consuming. Sophisticated antisurface and antiaircraft missile launchers cannot be easily removed, and they require elaborate and expensive alignment when reinstalled. Finally, it would be difficult for U.N. member states to reach the political decision to send large, expensive ships manned with numerous personnel into risky areas without any weapons.

In the future, it may be that unarmed peace-keeping operations could be carried out only by small combatants or by cargo or transport ships, should the U.N. not become more flexible on this issue. One solution might be that ships under U.N. control be allowed to maintain their weapon configuration but with strict rules of engagement that restrict their use to those circumstances specifically authorized by U.N. headquarters. Another solution could be to operate ships with their weapons in place but without embarking ammunition. In any case, it is an issue that must be carefully analyzed should the United Nations desire that a ship's capabilities be fully available in peace-keeping operations.

For the Gulf of Fonseca operations, two important measures were adopted to avert risks to the unarmed FPBs and increase their margin of safety. First, as mentioned by the Secretary-General in his report of 27 April 1990, ONUCA maintained informal contacts with the principal irregular forces and insurrectionist movements in the region in order to seek their cooperation in the implementation of ONUCA's mandate and to ensure that no threat was presented to ONUCA's personnel. In spite of reservations expressed by the insurrectionists concerning ONUCA's original mandate, the Nicaraguan Resistance was already engaged in the process of demobilization, and the FMLN assured the Chief

Military Observer that all its personnel had received orders not to undertake any hostile action against ONUCA verification centers or patrols. Moreover, the FMLN had suggested that certain steps be taken to reduce the risk of accidental confrontations with ONUCA, and, according to the April 1990 report, these measures had been implemented.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, it had originally been planned to station the FPBs in El Salvador, but the base was changed before their arrival to a new location near San Lorenzo, Honduras.<sup>23</sup> There was no official explanation, but it is easy to infer that one reason might have been the unstable situation and continued hostilities in El Salvador, which limited ONUCA's ability to patrol in that country and forced ONUCA to maintain there only a verification center, in the capital. Another reason might have been the "suggestions" made by the FMLN that the FPBs might be threatened should they be based in El Salvador. In any case, the new location was adopted, and it offered a safer environment for the ships.

The fact that the FPBs were to operate unarmed forced an early definition of the rules of engagement (ROE) to be included in the final settlement between Argentina and the U.N. It was agreed that the FPBs and their crews would operate unarmed, and that should an FPB be attacked during a patrol, the crew would take evasive action, withdraw from the attack scene, and report the incident to ONUCA Headquarters, asking for the immediate assistance of the naval authorities of the coastal state having jurisdiction over the waters where the FPB was operating.<sup>24</sup>

These ROE did not follow the classic way in which navies traditionally operate. They did not even consider the undeniable right of self-defense. However, the ROE were consistent with the mission and the policy of maintaining unarmed ships in the area. Clearly, peace-keeping operations require highly disciplined naval crews able to change their ways of conducting operations; although trained to react aggressively when faced with combat situations, the crews need to adopt a more passive attitude as qualified, impartial observers. This said, the degree of risk incurred by operating under such conditions is one of the main factors to be analyzed when planning peace-keeping operations.

**Logistic Support.** The United Nations required the Argentine government to keep its ships in the mission area capable of operating, on the average, 150 hours per month per FPB. To satisfy this requirement, the Argentine Navy deployed a mobile maintenance team composed of one officer, two enlisted men, and a "Conex" box (a standard metal container) with the necessary tools and spare parts.

The Argentine Navy has always encouraged and trained its crews to carry out onboard maintenance. That policy proved valuable in this environment, because

## 54 Naval War College Review

as a result each crew had the necessary skills to interact actively with the small mobile maintenance team in performing maintenance.

The Argentine squadron commander was directly responsible for FPB readiness in the field. He could address to the Argentine naval attaché in Washington, D.C., those special spare parts requirements that could not be satisfied in the local area. Moreover, he had the support of Argentine Navy technical departments in solving unusual problems as they arose.

It is necessary to mention that the usual difficulties of maintenance were increased by the features of the area. One negative factor was the distance between the sources of logistical support and the FPBs. Another problem was the environmental conditions, which affected equipment and required additional effort by maintenance personnel. The high temperatures produced unexpected failures in battery electrolytes and gyrocompass fluid. The intense use of the FPBs in these conditions decreased the time between failures and increased the frequency of maintenance work. The human factor was the key in overcoming these difficulties. Both the Argentine maintenance team and crews were highly committed to their mission and considered it a matter of personal and national pride to keep the FPBs operational in accordance with the U.N. requirements. As usual, human motivation made the difference between success and failure.

The host country, Honduras, provided space within the commercial port of San Lorenzo for naval group installations, allocated pier space to the FPBs, and allowed the vessels to be maintained in drydock facilities in the port of Amapala and later at the Amapala Naval Base. The rapid bottom growth of barnacles required frequent use of these facilities.

As part of the agreement reached between the U.N. and Argentina, ONUCA built the following installations for the naval group: the commandant's (squadron commander's) office; an operations office; general office, mess, and recreational facilities; an operations support group workshop; a guardhouse for two men; a kitchen; sanitary installations; and warehouse space for two Conex boxes stocked with spare parts, tools, lubricants, and oils. Furthermore, ONUCA also installed a pierside 220-volt electrical system with 100-kilowatt-hour capacity, a water pipeline and in-line purification system, and a five-thousand-gallon fuel tank to service the FPBs. The U.N. was responsible for providing all fuel. Argentine personnel were housed in two local hotels in Choluteca, a city located about thirty kilometers from the port. Ground transportation was provided by ONUCA vehicles.

In combined operations involving different countries, communications is always a critical issue, due basically to the differences in equipment. In this case, ONUCA provided UHF-FM, VHF-FM, and walkie-talkie equipment to all



operational units and to shore facilities involved. This arrangement was very effective in linking helicopters, FPBs, and the Verification Centers.

Finally, the transportation of the FPBs from Argentina to the Gulf of Fonseca and back was provided by cargo ships chartered by the U.N. The return trip was onboard a U.N.-chartered Argentine Navy cargo ship. The burden of logistical efforts was jointly shared by ONUCA and the Argentine Navy. After the craft arrived in the operations area, ONUCA provided funding support which reimbursed the Argentine Navy logistics system.

In the end, all logistical arrangements proved satisfactory in ensuring FPB readiness throughout the eighteen-month deployment. The key points that ensured success were: assigning all maintenance responsibilities to national teams, standardizing communication equipment, and maintaining fluid coordination among all parties.

**Personnel.** Due to funding concerns, the U.N. required that the size of each FPB crew be reduced from the normal nine, suggesting that the personnel usually dedicated to weapons be assigned elsewhere. The Argentine Navy agreed to man each FPB with a crew of six: two officers (one lieutenant and one lieutenant junior grade or ensign) and four enlisted men. The total number for the four FPBs was twenty-four. Additionally, the Argentine task force was augmented by the squadron commander (a lieutenant commander), the mobile maintenance team (Grupo de Apoyo Operativo, or operational support group, in Argentine Navy terms) of one officer and two enlisted men, and a navy physician. The entire FPB squadron comprised twenty-nine members of the Argentine Navy.

The United Nations normally requires that personnel be assigned for a one-year tour, but due to Argentine Navy regulations all task force personnel were rotated home after six months (with an overlap of key personnel). This conveniently matched the original six-month ONUCA mandate and its subsequent six-month extensions. In an attempt to decrease the time needed to adapt to the operational arena, some personnel who had formed part of the first deployment group were sent again in the third rotation.

All naval personnel enjoyed the same privileges and immunities as did the ONUCA observers.<sup>25</sup> These privileges and immunities are enumerated in Article 105 of the United Nations Charter and Article VI of the Convention on Privileges and Immunities (concerning experts on mission, which applies to observers), and were acceded to by all five governments in the mission area.<sup>26</sup>

Argentine Navy personnel were allowed use of their national uniform with the following modifications: a shoulder patch provided by the U.N. was attached on one shoulder and a national identifying symbol (in this case a small Argentine flag) on the other; United Nations berets, cap badges, scarves, and field caps provided by the U.N. were to be used.

## 56 Naval War College Review

Although the observer selection criteria are the prerogative of the government providing the observers, the United Nations usually establishes clear requirements with regard to rank, professional background (as concerning combat or combat troop-training experience), physical condition, and medical examinations. In this case, the naval group members were not considered as observers (although, as noted, they enjoyed the same privileges and immunities) but as ships' crews having a specific patrolling mission; therefore, for them the Argentine government was obliged only to satisfy U.N. regulations concerning medical fitness and documentation.

Finally, it is interesting to consider training. Although the FPBs' usual sub-Antarctic operating area of Southern Argentina presents environmental conditions very different from those of the subtropical Gulf of Fonseca, both regions demand the professional skills required for sailing in restricted waters, close to the land, and in poorly charted waterways. From the naval point of view, the highly trained Argentine ships' crews did not require any special training. The crews studied the U.N.-provided guidebook for ONUCA military observers outlining rights and duties and received a background briefing on the general area; they were oriented as well to the details of the mission and the specific agreements reached between the U.N. and the Argentine government. Area in-processing and familiarization required very little time. The fact that the crew members were not classified as military observers simplified the indoctrination task.

In the author's personal opinion, the major issue for the average, trained naval crewman involved in peace-keeping operations is not the professional requirements but the necessary change of attitude mentioned above, from that of a combatant to that of a peace-keeper. The classic proactive attitude encouraged as the correct naval demeanor needs to be transformed into the equally firm but less aggressive behavior befitting impartial members of an international group. The change of mental "gears" from the role of active participant to that of witness or observer requires much effort—to capture the spirit of peace-keeping, to think of oneself as a U.N. representative rather than as a member of a national military force, and to act within narrowly defined and restrictive rules. All of these changes of attitude may take more time than is normally required for other formal training.

**Financial Arrangements.** The U.N. assumes the responsibility for paying the costs of its sponsored peace-keeping operations. However, each operation presents peculiar features that need to be discussed and agreed upon.

The expenses of the naval operation in the Gulf of Fonseca began with the predeployment FPB preparations. The United Nations paid for painting the ships in accordance with U.N. rules, dismantling the weapons systems, and the

environmental modifications that enabled the ships to operate in a tropical environment. The U.N. then funded the transportation of the four FPBs to the deployment area via chartered cargo ship and for the transportation of the crews by air. In the operations area, the U.N. paid for the construction of support facilities ashore, communications equipment, and ground transportation.

As the Argentine government was ultimately to be reimbursed by the U.N. for ensuring the FPBs' readiness in the mission area, the Argentine Navy was required to provide an accurate running total of costs, including FPB preventive and corrective maintenance, spare parts, depreciation, and operation. The U.N. insured the FPBs against damage to third parties and collision. Additionally, as noted, it provided the fuel oil necessary for operations.

With respect to personnel costs, a problem arose over a discrepancy between the per diem allowance allocated by the U.N. and that set by Argentine regulations for governmental officers performing duties in Central America. The resulting gap in pay could not be resolved, and making up the difference was the major national cost incurred by the Argentine government.

It is easy to infer that ship deployments are a very costly operation for the United Nations. The financial aspects of peace-keeping are in fact a major problem for the international organization. In the words of the Secretary General, "A chasm has developed between the tasks entrusted to this Organization and the financial means provided to it."<sup>27</sup> Clearly, to deploy a group of large ships for a long period of time would be a very expensive operation for the U.N. In the Gulf of Fonseca, the small size of the naval vessels, the small number of crewmembers, and the simple technology of the units involved favored the feasibility of the operation. In actions that involve larger ships, over longer periods of time, funding may be the most crucial issue to be resolved. In some cases a member state might be able to afford the financial burden of its own fleet operations dedicated to a U.N. peacekeeping mission. But this financial self-sufficiency, which is available only to a few rich countries, may be seen by other U.N. member states as affecting the indispensable independence of the mission's operation and thereby jeopardize the U.N. image. In fact, if the United Nations cannot afford its own missions, peace-keeping operations will be dependent on the member states with financial capability to pay for them. These considerations can only complicate the financial problems of mounting peace-keeping operations.

**Formal Process.** While the preliminary agreements discussed above were being developed, the Argentine government and the U.N. exchanged the necessary formal communications. On 6 April 1990, the U.N. Secretary-General addressed a letter to the Permanent Representative of Argentina to the United Nations presenting the formal requirement for the FPBs in accordance with

## 58 Naval War College Review

previous negotiations. The interesting factor to be considered here is the Argentine decision-making process that facilitated the deployment of national naval forces under the U.N. flag. According to the Argentine Constitution, the National Congress is the branch invested with the power to approve the deployments of military forces outside the country's borders. However, since the U.N. Security Council had made a formal representation to Argentina, and since signing the United Nations Charter is viewed as constituting a formal commitment on the part of any signatory, the executive branch of the Government of Argentina assumed it was allowed to make the decision by itself. Furthermore, the constitutional congressional power with respect to deployment of military forces is usually interpreted as referring to the use of such forces in combat. Hence, this power may not necessarily be applicable when forces are engaged in unarmed peace-keeping operations. In any case, the political decision was taken by the Executive on the advice of the ministers of foreign affairs and defense, and was not challenged.

The formal response of the Argentine government was dated 6 June 1990. By this time most of the operational arrangements and agreements between the parties had been achieved. On 18 July 1990, a note outlining the main points of the different agreements, including the rules of engagement, was presented by the Argentine U.N. Representative and, per normal diplomatic protocol, this note with the Secretary-General's response with no modifications was adopted as the final document of agreement.

Meanwhile, on 27 June 1990, the Argentine FPBs arrived in the mission area to start the first peace-keeping operation involving naval units under U.N. control and flag.

### Operations in the Gulf of Fonseca

When the four Argentine FPBs, named ARA (for Armada de la República Argentina) *Baradero*, *Barranqueras*, *Clorinda* and *Concepción del Uruguay*, arrived in Honduras in late 1990, the situation in Central America was still far from quiet.

The Nicaraguan Resistance had been demobilized with the assistance of ONUCA forces, but relations between the newly elected democratic president, Violeta Chamorro, and the Sandinista forces were very strained. In El Salvador, despite talks between the government and the FMLN, intense military actions continued to be mounted by both parties, and ONUCA activities were accordingly restricted. In June 1990 ONUCA was carrying out its second six-month mandate (that established by Security Council Resolution 654/90), with observers from Brazil, Canada, Colombia, Ecuador, India, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, and Venezuela (in all, 254), with an aviation group from Canada of

130 personnel, and now with the newly arrived twenty-nine man naval group from Argentina. The total military force was 413 personnel.

On 29 June 1990, two days after their arrival, the FPBs hoisted the U.N. flag for the first time in a ceremony officiated by the Chief of Military Observers, Spanish General Agustín Quesada Gomez. The FPBs then conducted their first navigational cruise of the area, combining the purposes of patrol and familiarization. Two days later, on 1 July, three of the ships departed on their first operational patrol in the Gulf of Fonseca and ventured as far as the open Pacific Ocean.

**Operational Organization.** It was not easy to translate into a concrete naval mission the Security Council mandate, which called for on-site verification of the cessation of aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements operating in the region, and of the non-use of the territory of one state for the purposes of attacking others. It was possible, however, to agree that the FPBs would patrol the Gulf of Fonseca with observers aboard, monitor the area to verify the cessation of maritime aid to irregular forces and insurrectionist movements, investigate charges of breach of the commitments of the Esquipulas II agreement, and, above all, to establish a U.N. presence as a deterrent to improper activities.

To accomplish the assigned missions, the squadron commander, working with the Verification Center's operations officer and intelligence officer, designed several patrol patterns by which the FPBs could effectively cover the area. Each patrol required at least one embarked observer. The task of the observer, supported by the crew, was to identify and relay ashore all contacts in order to develop a complete database from which the area's maritime traffic patterns could be determined; this was then analyzed and evaluated for suspicious behavior.

During the first fifteen days that the crews were in the area, their main concern was with area familiarization to verify the doubtful accuracy of their navigation charts and the channel buoyage. This completed, daily patrols were carried out in the Gulf of Fonseca and on rivers discharging into it. Where shallow water prevented FPB operations, the craft anchored and deployed two crew members and one observer in a small rubber motorboat (Zodiac-type). Operations were executed without restriction in Honduran and Nicaraguan waters, but FPB commanders were ordered to remain outside of three nautical miles of the Salvadoran coast because of possible threats from that shoreline. The Salvadoran restriction was lifted in September 1990. That same month, the FPB crews became familiar enough with the area to begin night patrols. It was also during this period that patrols began incorporating Alouette and Bell JetRanger helicopters, each carrying one observer and one Argentine Navy officer. These

## 60 Naval War College Review

new capabilities broadened the area coverage, which enhanced the effectiveness of the deterrent presence desired by the U.N.

In his report to the U.N. Security Council dated 26 October 1990, the Secretary-General stated that the San Lorenzo-based naval group had performed 1,180 patrol hours since the beginning of its operation, and he described its activities.<sup>28</sup> In the same report the Secretary-General, after providing a broad appraisal of the situation in Central America and the effectiveness of the peace-keeping operation, asked the Security Council for a new (second) six-month extension to the ONUCA mandate. The Secretary-General proposed to reduce the number of observer personnel by about forty percent (to 158), the number of helicopters by fifty percent (from twelve to six), and also the rank of the Chief of Military Observers—but to retain the whole naval group.<sup>29</sup> This proposal was fully accepted by the Security Council. It is possible to infer from the 26 October report that in fulfilling the U.N.'s main objective (which was to establish a visible and deterrent presence to prevent violations of the Esquipulas II agreement<sup>30</sup>), the naval group had become the most important and effective instrument at this stage of the peace-keeping operations.

**Relations with the Parties.** The presence of naval units was by far less intrusive in the area than ground-based forces or even aviation. In fact, no complaints arose against FPB activities, and on many occasions the Verification Center was obliged to refuse requests for FPB intervention in local fishing disputes and other activities that lay outside the purview of the ONUCA mandate.

However, the relationship between the Argentine naval group under U.N. control and some of the parties to the Esquipulas II agreement were, in the beginning, not always easy. It was necessary to overcome the mistrust of some of these countries and to exhibit a permanent attitude of impartiality with respect to all parties. There were three major areas of confidence-building and coordination. First, in coordination with the squadron commander, the Verification Center's operations officer was made responsible for preparing a weekly FPB patrol plan. This plan was presented in advance to the three countries with territorial waters in the Gulf of Fonseca (El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua). Second, visits by the FPBs to naval bases in the three countries were scheduled on a regular basis. These visits were usually conducted twice monthly at the Amapala Naval Base in Honduras and the La Union Naval Base in El Salvador, and once monthly at the Corinto Naval Base in Nicaragua (which was far distant from San Lorenzo). These visits were very useful for exchanging information, discussing common concerns, and improving general relationships. A common language (Spanish) was spoken by the three regional navies and the Argentine crews; this clearly facilitated communication among the parties. Third, all parties were advised that one FPB with observers would always be on duty, ready to

investigate claims and incidents. Luckily, after some months of operations, situations requiring investigation became infrequent.

During the eighteen months of operations in the Gulf of Fonseca, the naval group achieved full acceptance and understanding of its presence and mission. Relations with the parties, even with those who had been at first most reluctant to accept a U.N. presence, became excellent. In informal comments, the conflicting parties acknowledged the stabilizing effect of the FPBs on the area. Perhaps this was one of the more important successes of the entire peace-keeping operation.

**Internal Relations.** It is always a challenge to mount military operations in which multinational forces act under a combined international staff, particularly if they involve naval operations in an alien environment. In such situations, it is almost self-evident that emphasis needs to be placed on human relations and the understandable concerns that arise over the rights, duties, responsibilities, and safety of the national personnel and equipment employed. Because of this, and despite the fact that command and staff relationships had been negotiated and agreed to prior to the FPBs' arrival in the Gulf, arrangements needed to be readjusted after the start of operations.

In the beginning, all staff and planning responsibilities rested with the assigned U.N. Observers, because they were officially assigned as part of the Verification Center staff. However, it soon became apparent that the active participation of the squadron commander in all planning processes was not only desirable but essential. There also developed a close cooperation between the FPBs' commanding officers and the Verification Center's staff members, one that was highly beneficial for both parties.

One of the key ingredients of healthy relationships in an international environment is mutual trust. This trust is an essential requirement for good relationships and efficient teamwork, and it arises between military members of an ad hoc organization only through reciprocal recognition of their professional capabilities. For this reason, it is important to emphasize here that when a country is to be involved in U.N. peace-keeping operations, it should assign the most highly trained and qualified personnel so as to promote this trust.

In Verification Center Fonseca, the fact that the international staff soon recognized the professional competence and operational expertise in FPBs of the newly arrived Argentine crews allowed quick integration and effective teamwork. As a result of the mutual trust engendered, a new set of internal organizational guidelines for the Verification Center was formulated and adopted as Standard Operating Procedures.

In December 1990, the U.N. requested that a senior Argentine naval officer be assigned as Chief of Verification Center Fonseca when the incumbent, a

## 62 Naval War College Review

Canadian, completed his tour of duty. This Argentine senior officer had charge of the international group of observers and operational control of all maritime patrols carried out by the FPBs and helicopters. Because Verification Center Fonseca had direct contact with officials from three different countries, its chief reported directly to the Chief of Military Observers in Tegucigalpa (see figure, above). This chain of command was satisfactory and effective for the fulfillment of the mission.

**Wrap-Up Operations.** Naval operations in the Gulf of Fonseca were carried out throughout 1991 with growing success and were recognized by the U.N. and the regional governments as an important contribution to the peace process in Central America.

The FPBs were very capable vessels, and the rate of their daily and nightly patrols reached more than 400 patrol hours in some months. The first Chief of Military Observers and also his relief visited Verification Center Fonseca and participated in special patrols. The U.N. Under Secretary-General himself visited the area in January 1991 and sailed on the FPBs and rubber motorboats. All this activity served to reinforce the idea that the U.N. naval presence was an essential element that contributed greatly to the difficult task of creating an appropriate environment for regional political reconciliation. The six-month ONUCA mandate was extended two more times during the course of 1991.<sup>31</sup>

In September 1991, the United Nations requested the Argentine government to provide a medical group composed of four navy physicians and four nurses. In October, as already mentioned, the U.N. requested an additional senior naval officer for ONUCA's staff in Tegucigalpa.

Meanwhile, peace talks between the FMLN and the government of El Salvador had experienced dramatic progress. After the total demobilization of the Nicaraguan resistance and the settling of Honduran and Salvadoran border problems through arbitration, the internal fighting in El Salvador remained as the last big conflict in the area. The growing isolation of the FMLN after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the loss of interest on the part of some regional neighbors who had supported the FMLN, and the increasing impediments to weapons traffic on the ground and at sea were important factors in forcing the insurrectionists to the negotiation table. The New York Agreement, signed by representatives of the government of El Salvador and the FMLN under United Nations auspices, was the first step of the peace process in this Central American country.

As a direct consequence of the New York Agreement, the U.N. Security Council decided, in Resolution 730/92, to terminate the ONUCA mandate. The FPBs made their last patrols on 16 January 1992. The next day, the Argentine government and the U.N. began preparations to redeploy the boats



and crews. On 1 March 1992, the FPBs were loaded on board the Argentine Navy cargo ship *ARA Canal Beagle* to return to their homeport in Ushuaia, Tierra del Fuego. The Argentine medical team remained in the area and worked with the United Nations Observer Group in El Salvador (ONUSAL), a new ad hoc U.N. organization created to monitor the continuing Salvadoran peace process.

***Results and Consequences of the Naval Operations.*** The Argentine naval group operated in the Gulf of Fonseca under the U.N. flag from 29 June 1990 through 17 January 1992. In January 1991, at the height of the operation, the FPBs logged more than 2,100 patrol hours conducted in over 290 separate patrols, with about 1,300 contacts made and three hundred ship photographs taken. During the course of the entire deployment, the FPBs together recorded more than 72,000 nautical miles sailed in 6,479 patrol hours, which means a daily average of twelve hours and 133 miles. Additionally, a monthly average of seventeen patrol hours were conducted in the rubber motorboats.

All this statistical information is useful for appreciating the great effort exerted by the FPBs and their crews, but to analyze the results of the peace-keeping operation in terms of mission accomplishment, one needs to consider other aspects. First, in January 1991 various intelligence sources concurred that the arms smuggling operations over maritime routes to El Salvador were being abandoned. An evaluation completed in August 1991 reported that no more than twenty percent of the already reduced arms traffic traversed sea routes. It might be difficult to believe that the reduction was the direct consequence of the U.N. naval presence, especially considering that FPB patrols were not allowed to stop or inspect seaborne traffic. However, the permanent presence of the U.N. observers and their systematic analysis of ship movements in the Gulf furnished them with a deep knowledge of the activities usual in the area, which in turn allowed them to detect and deter improper behavior. A typical example of this deterrent effect was a case in which a suspicious vessel approached by a U.N. FPB was found throwing its load overboard.

A second indicator of success in terms of mission accomplishment was the decrease in tension among the region's different national navies. Local sources reported that the U.N. presence at sea was a key factor in avoiding maritime boundary and fishing disputes that could lead to naval confrontations with unpredictable consequences. Finally, as has been mentioned already, the most remarkable success was the full acceptance of the FPBs' presence by the individual regional navies, fishermen, and local populations in recognition of the worth of the naval mission and the prudence and impartiality with which it was executed.

It is possible, however, to identify some operational problems and difficulties that existed, particularly at the beginning of the operation:

- Initial mistrust from some countries.
- Requests to intervene in matters outside the mandate.
- Problems resulting from the internal organization of a multinational task force.
- Adaptation to unusual functions in an unfamiliar environment.

Furthermore, the ONUCA naval mission was not risk-free. The FPBs had to patrol close to contested areas where vicious fighting persisted, and both day and night had to navigate poorly charted waters. On 23 June 1991, a terrorist attack using an RPG-7 grenade was directed against the ONUCA headquarters in Tegucigalpa. Luckily, no such attack or other type of aggression was ever directed against the FPBs, their crews, or Verification Center Fonseca during the course of the entire operation.

In the end, a consideration of all pros and cons indicates that the naval peace-keeping operation was a positive factor—it served as an important catalyst that moved the Central American peace process forward and opened a broad new area of opportunity for future employment of naval units in similar operations.

### Lessons and Prospects for Naval Peace-Keeping

The U.N. naval group was able to accomplish its mission with a minimum of interference in the sovereign territorial rights of the countries involved and to maintain maximum surveillance capability in its area of responsibility. The basic task of verifying the commitment of the participating parties to the region's pacification was effectively accomplished. It is clear that the U.N. naval presence was a stabilizing factor in the conflict.

Among the options that can be taken in peace-keeping operations, ships can be very useful as instruments for achieving peace in conflicts that involve maritime boundaries or fishing disputes. The relatively long period that a ship can stay on station allows it to monitor or control neutralized areas between two opposing naval forces. Ships or ships' boats can also be effectively employed in riverine areas to verify ceasefires or other such commitments that require observers to be situated aboard a waterborne platform or the putting ashore of observers in areas where rival claims are contested. In general, as the naval operations in the Gulf of Fonseca amply proved, the use of ships broadens the spectrum of instrumentalities that can be applied to peace-keeping in any conflict environment that has a maritime aspect.

On the other hand, there exist considerations that should be more completely analyzed in light of this first experience using naval units under U.N. control.

First, should a U.N. member state want to participate in or support a peace-keeping operation involving ships, it must resign itself to giving up national control of its units and accepting the risk of putting the lives and safety of its crews in foreign hands. This is a difficult but essential political decision.

This said, it was beneficial that an Argentine national acted as squadron commander ashore and that the ships' commanding officers received their orders through him in the language, terms, and with the authority of a fellow countryman—while the force was acting under U.N. control. It is important to note that peace-keeping operations do not require the same diversity of nationalities to ensure legitimacy as do operations that enforce a decision through the use of force. Therefore, the fact that the naval units are of one single state may actually facilitate an operation. This conclusion does not apply to observers, who must be of different nationalities.

Further, a U.N. member state sending ships to a peace-keeping operation should be capable of providing the appropriate logistic support. Due to the multitudinous and specific logistic requirements of each ship class and each different navy, it is almost unthinkable to ask the U.N. to act as the supplier. The agreement executed between the U.N. and the Argentine government, through which the former provided the financial means and the latter guaranteed a satisfactory degree of unit readiness, can be considered as a satisfactory solution and may serve as a good model for future peace-keeping operations.

Another interesting issue to be considered is the training—or reorientation—of combat personnel. The daily tasks performed by the FPB crews were themselves not very different from their usual routine. While it is of course necessary that crews be well trained and qualified to operate in the environment of the designated mission area, they will experience few problems in the peace-keeping operation itself. The main training effort should be directed at the commanding officer and at staff levels. These officials need to know all the peculiar aspects of the conflict, the restrictions imposed by the U.N. Security Council mandate, and as the most important issue they need to be mentally prepared to assume a different role than they are accustomed to. This statement is valid whether the officers are U.N. observers themselves or, as in the case of the Gulf of Fonseca, provide the platforms to carry them.

Another point worth commenting upon has to do with U.N. regulations. The United Nations' rules need to be flexible should it at some future date decide to use larger naval combatants in peace-keeping operations and should it want to keep operational costs down. It would be very difficult and very costly to disarm large naval combatants; the U.N. should seek other ways to monitor the use of force or it should think about using non-naval ships. U.N. color and marking requirements may also need to be simplified to avoid unnecessary costs

and delays in the event that the use of large naval combatants is desirable or necessary.

In these present times, when the international security environment permits and encourages U.N. peace-keeping, one of the main problems is the financial cost of such operations. This problem has been clearly stated by the U.N. Secretary-General, and it was an issue during the Gulf of Fonseca operations when the U.N. encountered delays and difficulties in meeting its financial commitments. This problem needs to be carefully considered before large and expensive ships are committed to peace-keeping operations. It is clear that the financial capability of the U.N. should be bolstered to allow the organization to ask for ships of its member states and to fund their use without having to depend on rich or self-sufficient states. This is a way to promote the U.N. image of impartiality, independent decision-making, and real power.

The final conclusion is that peace-keeping operations in the Gulf of Fonseca carried out by Argentine Navy units under the U.N. flag demonstrated the capability and flexibility that naval ships add to a peace-keeping mission, while also demonstrating the problems inherent in such operations. The experience the United Nations gained in peace-keeping operations with naval units in the Gulf of Fonseca will undoubtedly lead to a broader spectrum of opportunities wherein navies can be employed as agents of peace.

---

### Notes

1. United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, *An Agenda for Peace. Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peacekeeping. Report of the Secretary-General Pursuant to the Statement Adopted by the Summit Meeting of the Security Council on 31 January 1992*, Report A/47/277, S/24111 (New York: 1992), p. 15.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
4. United Nations General Assembly, *Comprehensive Review of the Whole Question of Peacekeeping Operations in All Their Aspects*, 47th Session, Report A/47/253 (New York: 1992), p. 7.
5. United Nations, *Letter dated 5 January 1989 from the UN Secretary-General to the Foreign Ministers of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua* (New York: 1989), p. 5.
6. *An Agenda for Peace*, p. 15.
7. Following U.N. usage, "insurrectionist" is employed here rather than "insurgent."
8. Naciones Unidas, *Asamblea General y Consejo de Seguridad, Anexo: Procedimiento para la paz firme y duradera en Centroamerica*, A/42/521, S/19085, 31/08/87 (New York: 1987), p. 6. The agreement took its name from the conference at which it was concluded, known as the Esquipulas II Summit Meeting. The Summit itself was so named, though it was held in Guatemala City, because it was considered to be the continuation of an earlier summit meeting held in the Guatemalan city of Esquipulas, near the Honduran border.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
10. U.N., *Letter dated 5 January 1989*, p. 4.
11. United Nations General Assembly and Security Council, *Tela Declaration*, A/44/451, S/20772 (New York: August 1989), p. 4.
12. United Nations Security Council, *Report of the Secretary-General*, S/208965 (New York: October 1989), p. 3.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
14. *Ibid.*
15. *Ibid.*, p. 5.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
17. United Nations Security Council, *United Nations Observer Group in Central America: Report of the Secretary-General*, S/21274 (New York: April 1990), p. 10.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 4. When it was that the number of ships was changed, or why, is unclear. Presumably the change arose from the difficulties encountered in obtaining the vessels.
19. These boats were built by Israel Aircraft Industries and were transferred in 1978 to the Argentine Navy, which rated them as "coastal patrol craft." They are 19.8 meters (65 feet) in length and 5.5 meters (18 feet) in beam, drawing 1.8 meters (5.8 feet) at 35 tons full load displacement. They are powered by two General Motors V12-71T diesels for a maximum speed of 22 knots.
20. The officers were Captain Osvaldo Linero, former commander of the Fast Patrol Boat Division in Ushuaia, and Lieutenant Jorge Scieurano, former commanding officer of a *Dabur*-class FPB.
21. United Nations, *The United Nations Flag Code and Regulations*, p. 5, pt. D.
22. *Report of the Secretary-General S/21274*, pp. 5-6.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 4.
24. Permanent Mission of the Argentine Republic to the United Nations, *Letter Addressed 18 July 1990 to the UN Secretary-General*, (New York: 1990), p. 2.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 1, pt. A.
26. The main privileges and immunities quoted in Article VI are: (a) "Immunities from personal arrest or detention and from seizure of their personal baggage"; (b) "In respect of words spoken or written and acts done by them in the course of the performance of their mission, immunity from legal process of every kind. . . ."; (c) "Inviolability for all papers and documents"; (d) "For the purpose of their communication with the UN, the right to use codes and to receive papers or correspondence by courier or in sealed bags." Subparagraphs (e) and (f) deal with privileges concerning baggage and currency exchange.
27. Report A/47/277, S/24111, p. 69.
28. United Nations Security Council, *Grupo Observadores de las Naciones Unidas en Centroamérica Informe del Secretario General del 26 octubre 1990*, S/21909 (New York: 1990), pp. 5-6.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
31. U.N. Security Council Resolutions 691/91 and 719/91.

---

Ψ

---

## First Announcement and Call for Papers — *War in History* —

. . . A major new journal embracing the study of war in all its aspects—economic, social, and political as well as military. Under the editorship of Hew Strachan, of the University of Glasgow, and Dennis Showalter, of The Colorado College, and with Editorial and Editorial Advisory boards that include three Naval War College faculty members, *War in History* recognizes that military history has been integrated into the broader study of history and that military historians are now equipped with the insights of other disciplines. The journal will be refereed and unrestricted as to period; it will address maritime and air as well as land warfare and will aim to introduce (through reviews or in translation) the work of scholars writing in languages other than English.

Three issues of *War in History* will be published each year, the first in early 1994. To obtain sample copies of the first issue or detailed *Notes for Contributors*, write to: Helen Arnold, Promotion Department, Edward Arnold, Hodder & Stoughton Publishers, Dunton Green, Sevenoaks, Kent TN13 2YA, U.K.