



**Mats Berdal**

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***United Nations Peacekeeping  
at a crossroads***

**The Challenges of Management  
and Institutional Reform**

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### ***About the Author***

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## ***The Rise and Fall of UN Activism***

At the first-ever Security Council summit, held in late January 1992, world leaders expressed unfeigned optimism about the future role of the United Nations in international relations. Its achievements, in supervising the transition from South African rule to independence in Namibia and in assisting the peace process in Central America, were seen to foreshadow a more constructive pattern of involvement in the resolution of regional conflicts. Added to this, the willingness of the USA to use the UN as the source of legitimation for actions against Iraq during the Gulf crisis, raised expectations further about the place of the organisation in the realm of international security. At the same time, Boris Yeltsin's presence at the meeting - following the abortive coup in the Soviet Union in August 1991 - signified, in the eyes of the media, politicians and pundits alike, that the paralysing influence of the Cold War would no longer impair the effectiveness of the Security Council as the organ with "primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security".

Underlying much of the optimism expressed in early 1992 was the widely-held view that the "established principles, procedures and practices of peace-keeping"<sup>1</sup> would serve as an increasingly effective instrument in reducing the level of violent conflict within the international system.<sup>2</sup> It was against this background that the Security Council invited the newly appointed Secretary General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, to prepare an "analysis and recommendations on ways of strengthening and making more efficient within the framework and provisions of the Charter the capacity of the United Nations for preventive diplomacy, for peacemaking and for peace-keeping".<sup>3</sup> By the time the report was completed, in June 1992, the Security Council had also authorised three new major "peace-keeping" operations: in Croatia, Cambodia and Somalia.

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<sup>1</sup> The phrase belongs to former Under-Secretary General for Peacekeeping Operations, Marrack Goulding. See, Marrack Goulding, "The Evolution of United Nations Peace-keeping", Cyril Foster Lecture, University of Oxford, 4 March 1993.

<sup>2</sup> See for example, "Hurd urges Ghali to extend peacekeeping role of UN", *Independent*, 14 January 1992, "World Leaders to call for enhanced UN role", *Financial Times*, 31 January 1992.

<sup>3</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace* (New York: UN Department of Public Information, 1992).

By the summer of 1993, however, most of the initial euphoria about the potential role of the UN had dissipated. The continuing brutality of ethnic warfare in Bosnia-Herzegovina, the complete failure of the first UN operation in Somalia, the catastrophic relapse of Angola into civil war, and the ongoing problems suffered by the second UN operation in Somalia (UNOSOM II), had all undermined the initial sense of optimism surrounding the summit in 1992. Moreover, the slow pace of UN reform, continuing financial instability and the apparent reversal of American commitment to strengthen the UN, added to the perception of an organisation in crisis.

This, admittedly brief and incomplete, survey of events since early 1992 raises a fundamental issue. In discussing the future of UN peacekeeping it is essential to recognise that the difficulties experienced by contemporary peacekeeping forces are not *only* the result of the organisation's own inability to adapt to changing circumstances. At a deeper level these difficulties reflect the nature of an international political system which, although no longer polarised by superpower rivalry, is still characterised by conflicts of *interest* and *value* among states. Although the UN is more central to questions of international security than it was during the Cold War, states still think in terms of interests. The management of power is still a central theme of international relations, and, most importantly, there is no consensus among "major powers about the basis for international security".<sup>4</sup>

The failure to appreciate these realities provides an important background to some of the specific difficulties in which the UN now finds itself. Both in the case of Angola and Cambodia it was widely felt that by "de-linking" long-running civil wars from the wider pattern of East-West confrontation, lasting political settlements would be achieved. By the early 1990s, global rivalry was indeed no longer a factor in the Cambodian and Angolan conflicts. This did not, however, provide the necessary basis for a lasting settlement. The "lesson" here appears to be that it is not enough to make democratic multiparty elections within a finite time period the *single* "focal point" of comprehensive political settlements. In Angola and Cambodia insufficient attention was given to autonomous sources of conflict and to the consequent need for long-term post-election strategies.

As indicated above, however, the persistence of national interests and autonomous sources of conflict does not imply that nothing can or should be done to improve the effectiveness of the UN itself. A key issue which

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<sup>4</sup> Adam Roberts, "The United Nations and International Security", *Survival*, vol.35, no.2 (Summer 1993), p.3

deserves the most urgent attention relates to the *management* of UN military operations both in New York and in the field.

### ***The Management of UN Peacekeeping Operations***

The UN system for planning and supporting field operations remains largely unchanged since the end of the Cold War. For its *effective functioning*, the management of peacekeeping still relies to an unusual degree on improvisation, *ad hoc* arrangements and close working relationships among members of the Secretariat and between officers and civilian personnel in the field. When Boutros Boutros-Ghali assumed office in early 1992 he promised to introduce reforms that would "eliminate duplication, redundancy and excessive layering of offices and duties at the headquarters"<sup>5</sup>. Changes introduced since January 1992, however, have failed to address the central management problem with respect to peacekeeping: reforms have not reversed the growing decentralisation of peacekeeping functions within the Secretariat and the consequent diffusion of authority in the management of operations.

This problem has not been properly addressed by more recent efforts aimed at strengthening the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) in New York. These include: a modest expansion of staffing levels, including the appointments of one military officer responsible for training and coordination, a civilian de-mining expert and a civilian police adviser; the creation of an embryonic Planning and Coordination Cell which will eventually be headed by a Deputy Military Advisor, and the establishment of a Situation Room in New York. The Situation Room, which is currently manned by officers on short-term secondment from member states, was set up in connection with the UNPROFOR and UNOSOM operations, but will be extended to provide a general capability covering all missions. It does not, however, constitute a command centre in the strict military sense of the word. The need to strengthen UN capabilities in this area, however, have been amply demonstrated over the past year. As an ominous sign, however, the US Congress in September 1993 vetoed a modest Pentagon request for \$ 10 million to "beef up" the Situation Room.

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<sup>5</sup> Boutros Boutros-Ghali, "Empowering the United Nations", *Foreign Affairs* Winter 1992/93, p.100.

Measures have also been taken to enhance the flow of information into the UN from member states through the installation of an intelligence processing system in the DPKO. The system, known as JDIS (Joint Deployable Intelligence Support System), was donated and installed by the United States to support UNOSOM II operations, but is also viewed as an initial step which will eventually enable the Secretariat to receive, process and disseminate information provided by member states to the Organisation.

While all of these changes have undoubtedly improved the ability of the Secretariat to plan and coordinate operations more effectively, they represent more a response to current operations in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia than any overall long-term integrated plan. Partly because of financial constraints, but also owing to fierce bureaucratic resistance to a reexamination of the role and location of the Field Operations Division (FOD, located in the Department of Administration and Management), changes have been incremental and fragmented with insufficient attention to the requirements of coordinating activities between Departments, Divisions and Offices within the UN Secretariat.

Clearly, then, there is scope for improving existing mechanisms, and the absorption of FOD functions (logistics, personnel and finance) into the DPKO is one issue that needs to be looked at again. There are, however, a host of other issue areas which require urgent attention.

### ***Further Targets of UN Reform***

The dramatic increase in the number of UN operations since 1988 has been accompanied by, the growth of qualitatively new tasks assigned to military forces serving under the UN flag. These tasks now include, *inter alia*, ensuring uninterrupted delivery of humanitarian assistance to beleaguered populations in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Somalia; human rights monitoring in El Salvador and Cambodia; the disarmament, cantonment and demobilisation of armed factions as envisaged in the peace plans for Angola, Mozambique and Cambodia, and the preventive deployment of forces as in Macedonia.

In each of the cases listed above, the UN has based its activities on traditional or "classical" concepts of operation. Experiences over the past 18 months, however, have demonstrated that the "customary principles and practices of peacekeeping" are wholly inadequate as a basis for initiating and sustaining large-scale multicomponent missions interposed in the context of actual or latent civil war. Specifically, operations have shown that the self-

imposed operational restraints which have come to characterise UN peacekeeping - *ad hoc* mounting procedures, the absence of pre-deployment planning, a complex procurement system, restrictions on the use of force and covert intelligence, the effect of a broad geographical spread of military contingents and administrative personnel - are now seriously undermining the ability of multinational forces to carry out their assigned missions.

While operations in the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia, Somalia and Angola differ markedly in the complexity and the nature of their mandates, they all point to certain basic weaknesses which (although not new to the historical experience of peacekeeping) have been accentuated by the necessity of operating in the context of intra-state conflict where only sporadic consent has been obtained from parties to the conflict. Ten sets of issues merit special consideration:

*\* The limited logistic capabilities available to the Secretariat and the lack of a logistic planning cell to identify, coordinate and direct the logistics flow in the early stages of the operation.<sup>6</sup>*

*\* The failure to set up secure communications and clarify reporting channels between the UN Headquarters and missions in the field.*

*\* The failure to establish an effective command and control system in the field, that is, the necessary arrangement of personnel, equipment and procedures enabling the Force Commander to plan, direct and control forces in support of his mission.*

*\* The failure to provide Force and unit Commanders with intelligence of a political and military nature that may have a bearing on their operations. The question of "intelligence" is a sensitive one in the UN context, but one which must be addressed for several reasons. In the first place, a tactical intelligence capability is needed in order to avoid the kind of intelligence failures experienced in Somalia since May 1993.<sup>7</sup> Second, it is also needed if the UN is serious about developing a preventive and early warning capacity. Third, it is needed simply as an independent source of information, especially in politically and ethnically complex areas of deployment.*

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<sup>6</sup> For a personal account of the *ad hoc* nature of pre-deployment planning in support of peacekeeping operations, see Lewis Mackenzie, "Military Realities of UN Peacekeeping Operations", *RUSI Journal*, February 1993, p.21.

<sup>7</sup> 'Intelligence Failure Cited In Setbacks Against Aideed', *The Washington Post*, 8 October 1993.



*\* The lack of UN joint doctrine for other than traditional and largely 'static' peacekeeping operations. The paucity of joint doctrine is particularly noticeable with regard to civilian-military operations in support of humanitarian objectives.*

*\* Inadequate training of units from other than the traditional troop-contributing countries and the shortage of specialised units and personnel in three areas: logistics, communications and engineering.*

*\* Lack of tactical mobility to support operations within a theatre of deployment.*

*\* Insufficient attention to the requirements of force protection for UN forces in a semi-permissive operational environment.*

*\* An overall lack of air assets to carry out intra-theatre logistics airlift, surveillance, reconnaissance, communications and search and rescue tasks.*

*\* Continuing problems of financial support for peacekeeping operations; specifically, the persistence of structural or 'in-built' delays in UN's budgetary allocation procedure (caused in large part by the reluctance of the General Assembly to relinquish its prerogatives in the financial sphere).*

### **A Study in Failure: UN Angola Verification Mission II**

UN Angola Verification Mission II (UNAVEM II) was established in June 1991 to verify the cease-fire agreements set out in the Bicesse Accords of May 1991, and to observe the elections organised by the National Electoral Council. Although it was a small UN operation by the standards of the former Yugoslavia, Cambodia and Somalia operations, it powerfully illustrates the weaknesses outlined above. Angola has also received far less coverage than other operations even though the scale of the humanitarian tragedy followed by the resumption of civil war is unquestionably greater than in other areas of UN involvement. Finally, the Angolan case demonstrates the limits of what the UN can achieve if the Security Council lacks the political will to commit adequate resources to an operation.

Although, the UN had been closely involved in monitoring elections in Namibia in 1989 (UNTAG) and Nicaragua in February 1990 (ONUVEN), no learning process seems to have taken place. The logistical challenges facing the UNAVEM II were far more daunting in Angola; a country two-thirds the size of Western Europe with a war-ravaged, almost non-existent infrastructure in much of the country. In May 1992, the *Financial Times*

reported that "many diplomats" had already concluded that "unless there is additional external help, the poll will either have to be delayed or be so poorly organised as to lack credibility".<sup>8</sup> In fact, when the elections were held, on 29 and 30 September 1992, none of the key provisions of the original peace accord - including the demobilisation of rival armies, their cantonment, the custody of weapons and the extension of central administration to the whole of the country - had been fulfilled. As soon as the elections were over, UNITA's leader Jonas Savimbi, claimed massive fraud, refused to accept the results and left the newly formed Angolan Armed Forces. Within weeks, the country had relapsed into civil war which by now is estimated to have claimed more than 50,000 lives.

To observe and verify the Angolan elections for which 4.83 million had registered, UNAVEM II deployed 400 unarmed electoral observers drawn from some 90 different nationalities, 14 helicopters and two fixed-wing aircraft. The observers operated in teams of two and had to rely on sample observation, given the impossibility of covering all 6,000 polling stations. Although all 18 provinces and most of the municipalities were covered, the observer teams were able to spend an average of only 20 minutes at each station, enough to observe four votes being cast.<sup>9</sup> Observation of the counting was an even more incomplete process since the Electoral Law required that this took place at each of the polling stations. For this reason, as the Secretary General acknowledged in his report on the elections, "only a fraction of them could be observed".<sup>10</sup> Added to this, the wide range of nationalities involved and a critical lack of Portuguese speaking officials, created major language difficulties throughout the monitoring process.<sup>11</sup>

The effectiveness of the UNAVEM operation was also seriously impaired by poor logistic planning and an acute shortage of vehicles, air support for

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<sup>8</sup> "Angola hovers between recovery and the abyss", *Financial Times*, 11 May 1992.

<sup>9</sup> Details based on "Further Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM II)", S/ 24858, 25 November 1992, para.7.

<sup>10</sup> "Further Report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM II)," S/24858, 25 November 1992, para. 10.

<sup>11</sup> Personal interviews with election monitors attached to UNAVEM II in September 1992.

transport within Angola and reliable communications.<sup>12</sup> In order to deploy their electoral teams, and the supplies and communications network in the provinces, UNAVEM and the UNDP had to improvise "the largest air support operation ... ever mounted by the UN". Through "ingenuity and good will, as the Secretary General's Special Representative put it, 45 helicopters and 15 fixed-wing aircraft were obtained by borrowing from member states and chartering from commercial sources. Still, voting material, lighting, food, water and blankets often arrived late, if at all, polling stations.

The fact that the observer teams were deployed so thinly made it much more difficult for the UN to deny outright UNITA's charge that the elections were "recognizedly fraudulent and irregular". More seriously, the UN headquarters in New York failed to pick up the danger signals that were coming out of Angola in the months before the elections. Had this been done, the elections might have been postponed until the demobilisation programme was either completed or deemed to be "irreversible".<sup>13</sup> Along with the failure to implement other aspects of the peace plan, the stage was set for the resumption of a brutal and ruinous civil war.<sup>14</sup>

Still, the return of civil war to Angola cannot be blamed solely on the UN. As noted above, the powers which sponsored the Peace Accord (the United States, the Soviet Union and Portugal) failed to take account of the autonomous sources of conflict in Angola and, partly for this reason, paid little attention to the need for institutionalising local confidence-building measures after the election, whatever the outcome.

### ***Concluding thoughts***

The problem which the UN is now encountering in the running of its peacekeeping operations is not merely one of management. Indeed, if this were the case, there would not have been much cause for concern. It must also be recognised that the UN Charter is a document essentially about *inter-*

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<sup>12</sup> "So far so good in Angolan election", *Financial Times*, 3 October 1992. By contrast, UNTAG involved more than 6,000 UN civilian and military personnel in the process of supervising Namibia's transition to independence in 1989.

<sup>13</sup> The elections planned in Mozambique have been postponed precisely for those reasons.

<sup>14</sup> See, Mats Berdal, "The Resumption of Civil War in Angola", *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Vol.5, No.6, pp.284-285.

*state* conflicts. As such, it does not contain provisions "by which the Security Council or General Assembly may relate to non-state agencies such as liberation movements, communal minorities, or political parties."<sup>15</sup> Violence in the international system, especially after the collapse of multiethnic state structures, occurs primarily at the sub-state level, and the UN (or rather the member states that compose it) must now examine how it may intervene more effectively in these kinds of conflicts. Herein lies the most obvious deficiency of the Secretary General's *An Agenda for Peace* submitted to the Security Council in June 1992.

In terms of launching future peacekeeping operations, much more careful consideration must be given to the long-term political and administrative arrangements which an operation is intended to promote. Security Council mandates must be practicable, and not simply reflect moral indignation and the emotion of the moment. The corollary to this is that the UN must be prepared to withdraw or abstain from becoming involved in conflicts where its presence does not reinforce a broader political process towards the resolution of conflict. There has been a strong reluctance to adopt this course of action, though it is clearly preferable to an open-ended peacekeeping commitment which, as the Secretary General observed in the case of Croatia in late November 1992, "may involve the [Security] Council in a large and expensive commitment for an indefinite period of time, without any certainty that the mandate of the operation will be fulfilled".<sup>16</sup> In the absence of consensus among states about the basis for international security, the UN will be forced to concentrate its resources more narrowly on improving existing mechanisms and operations with *realisable* military as well as political objectives.<sup>17</sup> This may be more modest than the ambitious ideas flouted at the summit meeting in January 1992, but it is also the only politically and practically feasible course of action.

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<sup>15</sup> Sydney Bailey, "The United Nations and the Termination of Armed Conflict 1946-1964", *International Affairs* (Summer 1982), p.469.

<sup>16</sup> "Further Report of the Secretary General pursuant to SC res. 743 (1992)", S/24848, 24 November 1992, para. 46.

<sup>17</sup> On the reluctance of P5 members see, for example, Malcolm Rifkind, "Peacekeeping or Peacemaking? Implications and Prospects" *RUSI Journal*, April 1993, pp.1-5.

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