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The People-Centred Approach to Peace Operations: The New UN Agenda

DAVID CHANDLER

The September 2000 UN Millennium Assembly confirmed the need for a fundamental reform of UN peacekeeping operations. This reform is shaped by the need for a new 'people-centred' approach to conflict situations, no longer strictly bound by traditional 'state-centred' principles, such as non-intervention and state sovereignty. This article considers the impact of the proposals for UN peace negotiations, peacekeeping, peacebuilding and long-term conflict prevention. It concludes with a discussion of the implications of these reforms for the external management of post-conflict states and the changing roles of both the UN and NATO. It appears that there is a growing division of responsibility, with the authorization of military intervention and peacekeeping tasks increasingly falling to 'coalitions of the willing' while the UN develops its peacebuilding responsibilities with a coordinating role in post-conflict political and development activities.

The UN Secretary-General's Millennium Report 'We the Peoples' started the formal process of revising the UN's approach to peace operations after criticism of UN failures in Rwanda, Bosnia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s and NATO action over Kosovo which bypassed Security Council controls. As the Millennium Report notes in its introduction: 'No shift in the way we think or act can be more critical than this: we must put people at the centre of everything we do.'¹ The Report notes that a 'new understanding of the concept of security is evolving'.² International security during the Cold War was 'synonymous with the defence of territory from external attack' and was bound up with the principle of state sovereignty and its corollary of non-intervention.³ The post-Cold War conception of international security is different: 'The requirements of security today have come to embrace the protection of communities and individuals from internal violence', far from upholding sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention the demands of international security are deemed to necessitate a fundamental rethinking of the UN's strategy.⁴ The Secretary-General describes this new strategy as a 'more human-centred approach to security' as distinct from the previous

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'state-centred' approach.⁵ This Report was followed at the end of August by the Brahimi UN Panel Report with more detailed proposals for reform, which were ratified at the UN Millennium Summit in New York in September 2000.

This article considers the contrast between the assumptions of the new people-centred or human-centred approach and the earlier state-centred one and seeks to establish the impact of this approach on the reform of UN peacekeeping operations. It further considers the implications of peacekeeping reform for post-conflict states and for the structure of the United Nations and concludes with a consideration of whether the reforms will strengthen the role of the UN in international security or result in its further marginalization.

The People-Centred Approach

Prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, in a world shaped by imperial relationships and the ideology of race and empire, there was only partial international acceptance of the rights of state sovereignty and self-determination.⁶ In the post-war settlement the United States' dominance of the world economy enabled the construction of a new system of international regulation. As Justin Rosenberg writes, the US planners realized that 'the British Empire...will never reappear and that the United States may have to take its place', but that in the face of growing nationalism and the discrediting of empire, new institutions of management of international relations would be necessary to 'avoid conventional forms of imperialism'.⁷ Central to this new mechanism of international regulation was the conception of sovereign equality. The Nazi experience and the rise of non-European powers had undermined the elitist ideologies of race and empire and led to the defensive acceptance of a law-bound international system. As Norman Lewis notes:

The impact of the war and the sense of a loss of legitimacy ended what had, until then, been the inter-war consensus upon the non-applicability of the right to self-determination to colonial peoples... However, this consensus could no longer be sustained in the face of the new legal order, the ideological conflicts of the Cold War and the rise of nationalism within the colonial world.⁸

The political pressure on the leading world powers meant that the 1945 settlement, preserved in the principles of the UN Charter, was a decisive moment in the transformation of the international system. The UN Charter system, the first attempt to construct a law-bound international society of states, recognized all nation-states as equal. Article 1(2) calls for 'respect

for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples'; Article 2(1) emphasizes 'the principle of sovereign equality' of member states; and Article 55 stresses respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples.⁹ The UN system did not realize full sovereign equality in its own internal workings. The five permanent members of the powerful Security Council, the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China, were obliged to reach a consensus on policy, thereby giving the major powers the right of veto. Nevertheless, sovereign equality was formally recognized through equal representation in the General Assembly and through the principle of non-interventionism.

Sovereign states were clearly unequal in terms of power, wealth and resources. However, despite these limitations, the universal recognition of sovereign equality was a thoroughly radical conception of the authority of the non-Western state. Its authority was derived exclusively from its people and, as a consequence of this, the international order became one in which non-Western states had the same political legitimacy as the more developed Western states, despite the inequalities of economic and military power. This equality was confirmed on many occasions in UN resolutions, notably the Declaration on the Inadmissibility of Intervention in the Domestic Affairs of States and Protection of their Independence and Sovereignty of 21 December 1965 (Resolution 2131 (XX)) and the Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations and Cooperation among States in Accordance with the Charter of the United Nations of 24 October 1970 (Resolution 2625 (XXV)). The latter Declaration made it clear that: 'All States enjoy sovereign equality. They have equal rights and duties and are equal members of the international community, notwithstanding differences of an economic, social, political or other nature.'¹⁰ The official commentary to the latter document states:

No State or group of States has the right to intervene, directly or indirectly, for any reason whatever, in the internal or external affairs of any other State. Consequently, armed intervention and all other forms of interference or attempted threats against the personality of the State or against its political, economic and cultural elements, are in violation of international law.¹¹

The people-centred approach directly challenges this perspective of state sovereignty. Instead of the nation-state at the centre of policy priorities it is held to be the people of the state, particularly those most in need. This framework follows the approach of human rights advocates, who argue for an explicitly people-centred approach, making the subject of international policy the universal citizen, not the political citizen defined by the nation-state. The discourse of putting people first 'inaugurates a new kind of

citizenship, the citizenship of humanity'.¹² As leading international human rights theorist Nicholas Wheeler writes: 'The notion of common humanity/human solidarity is diametrically opposed to the statist paradigm which is predicated on the contention that state leaders and citizens do not have moral responsibilities or obligations to aid those beyond their borders.'¹³

People's human rights are seen to be particularly vulnerable in conflict situations. As the Millennium Report observes, despite international resolutions, 'the brutalization of civilians, particularly women and children, continues in armed conflicts':

Women have become especially vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation, while children are easy prey for forced labour and are often coerced into becoming fighters... In the most extreme cases, the innocent become the principal targets of ethnic cleansers and *genocidaires*.¹⁴

The emphasis on the rights of vulnerable people rather than the rights of states is explained as necessary because many non-Western states can no longer be assumed to be able, or willing, to safeguard the rights of their citizens. As the Millennium Report argues: 'States are sometimes the principal perpetrators of violence against the very citizens that humanitarian law requires them to protect.'¹⁵ Given the changing perspective of the non-Western state, the advocates of human rights argue that the international community must have the power to step in to safeguard the rights of the vulnerable.

The concept of empowering vulnerable people extends to the post-conflict situation and the prioritization of conflict-prevention and peacebuilding: 'Strategies of prevention must address the root causes of conflicts, not simply their violent symptoms.'¹⁶ The Secretary-General suggests that the 'root causes' of international conflict are no longer to be located in the geo-political competition of major states but rather in the internal political and social arrangements of much less influential powers:

The majority of wars today are wars among the poor. Why is this the case?... In many poor countries at war, the condition of poverty is coupled with sharp ethnic or religious cleavages. Almost invariably, the rights of subordinate groups are insufficiently respected, the institutions of government are insufficiently inclusive and the allocation of society's resources favours the dominant faction over others.¹⁷

The new context of international security concerns considers smaller and economically less developed states to be the most likely to be prone to

conflict due to problems of poverty, ethnic and cultural division and political exclusion. It is these states that will be increasingly subject to new peacekeeping approaches and are the focal point of ongoing policy discussions which attempt to establish a new balance between the rights of state sovereignty and the protection of human rights. This new people-centred approach, concerned with how small states treat their most vulnerable citizens, is a fundamentally different approach to that taken by the UN prior to the 1990s, when international peace was seen to be guaranteed through protecting the sovereign rights of smaller states from encroachment and intervention by the major powers.

The Reform of Peace Operations

In the first 40 years of the United Nations 13 peacekeeping operations were authorized, most of them to monitor ceasefire lines. After 1990 another 20 operations were mounted, involving 75,000 troops by 1994, at an annual cost of \$3.6 billion. Currently some 35,000 troops are deployed in 14 countries. But the change is not just a quantitative one, it has also been qualitative. 'While traditional peacekeeping had focused mainly on monitoring ceasefires, today's complex peace operations are very different.'¹⁸ UN peace operations today are no longer purely military. They are more complex, also seeking to modify the political, economic and social spheres, through strengthening political institutions and broadening their base, ensuring sustainable development, and through education, media and civil society work. This shift from a narrow military focus has meant that peacekeeping has become just one aspect of a more extensive process of peacebuilding. Peacebuilding is more civilian than military in content, 'a hybrid of political and development activities targeted at the sources of conflict.'¹⁹ The following sections outline the changes advocated by the UN Millennium Assembly to the four main aspects of peace operations: negotiations, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, and long-term conflict resolution.

Peace Negotiations

Prior to the 1990s, a UN peace operation began once the parties to a conflict had negotiated a settlement and then asked the UN to monitor and assist the implementation of it. Today, the UN is much less likely to come in at such a late stage of the process. Whereas, in the past, the assumptions of sovereignty and political independence indicated that any settlement must accord to the wishes of the parties, today the assumptions are that the parties to the conflict will need guidance to design an adequate settlement: 'Although peace negotiators (peacemakers) may be skilled professionals in

their craft, they are much less likely to know in detail the operational requirements of soldiers, police, relief providers or electoral advisors in United Nations field missions.²⁰ Knowledge of the complex needs of UN peacebuilding missions and the implementation framework of human rights concerns is held to be beyond many state negotiators focusing on the traditional task of bringing the parties in conflict to an agreement on the cessation of hostilities. The Brahimi Panel requests that any peace agreements which are to be implemented by the UN must be drawn up under UN guidance, with the UN having 'adviser-observers present at the peace negotiations' and ensuring that 'any agreement be consistent with prevailing international human rights standards'.²¹

This approach has been directly influenced by criticisms of the UN and international community attempts at mediation in the conflicts during the 1990s, where many commentators felt that too much credibility was often being given to local leaders. Leaving peace negotiations to regional representatives was felt to be giving international legitimacy to warlords and ethnic cleansers. Many commentators have criticized the need for negotiations at all. If the UN was serious about protecting the rights of vulnerable people it should have had the political will to impose a solution. Hugo Young argued in *The Guardian* that the 'allies' should not commit themselves to a negotiated settlement on Kosovo as this 'for all Clinton's sound-bite pieties, will be a deal and not a victory'.²² The influential media NGO, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, argued that the war over Kosovo was disappointing because it resulted in a 'Saddam Hussein peace', leaving Milosevic in power and failing to continue the war to take over the running of Serbia.²³ Daniel Goldhagen similarly suggested that war for unconditional surrender was the only viable solution for Serbia: 'As with Germany and Japan, the defeat, occupation and reshaping of the political institutions and prevailing mentality in Serbia is morally and, in the long run, practically necessary. With an ally-occupied Serbia...peace and eventually prosperity could come to the region.'²⁴

Once the stakes have been raised by people-centred goals it is difficult for advocates of these aims to accept peace deals around the negotiating table. The problem with the people-centred approach of ensuring that any peace settlement guarantees the rights of the most vulnerable, including rights of refugee return, restitution, war crimes trials and so forth, is that there can be little tendency towards compromise or negotiation.²⁵ Aryeh Neier, President of the New York-based Open Society Institute, argues that the human rights movement 'needs to develop the argument that the promotion of human rights should not be weighed against competing concerns'.²⁶ Any compromise between the parties is often labelled as 'appeasement' or condemned for condoning the gains of 'ethnic

cleansing'.²⁷ The removal of peace processes from a process of negotiation to the imposition of a rights-based settlement, regardless of context, can only lead to conflict rather than peace, as can be seen from the breakdown of the Rambouillet talks over Kosovo.²⁸

As Susan Woodward informed the UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 'the way [Rambouillet] was structured meant that it would fail' because the focus on protecting the rights of the most vulnerable (seen to be the ethnic-Albanian Kosovans) meant denying that 'this was a genuine conflict over territory...and both sides had arguments on their side, and this was not simply a matter of imposing an agreement on one that had violated...international law'.²⁹ Several commentators have noted that the NATO states were willing to go to war rather than seek a negotiated solution. Richard Falk observed: 'The recourse to war by NATO in these circumstances seems to have cast aside the legal, moral and political commitment to make recourse to war a *last resort*'.³⁰ It seems likely that people-centred peace settlements are more likely to necessitate international military intervention and to result in the prolongation of conflict in order to guarantee the protection measures required.

Peacekeeping

In the past the UN, which had been invited in by the parties, would have been forced to withdraw if renewed conflict broke out. Peacekeeping meant deploying monitors and lightly armed forces between ex-combatants once there was a peace to keep, not imposing peace on the parties. Today this is no longer seen to be adequate to protect the vulnerable from the risks of conflict. The UK government argues: 'We firmly believe that the doctrine of peacekeeping, which evolved in the 1950s in the context of interstate conflict, is no longer valid'.³¹ The consensus that UN peacekeeping mandates be extended to protecting civilians in armed conflicts, and the demand that UN troops or police 'who witness violence against civilians should be presumed to be authorized to stop it', establishes a very high threshold of expectation and necessitates the deployment of much larger military resources.³² The UN Brahimi Panel proposes that ensuring peace mandates are enforced 'means bigger forces, better equipped and more costly, but able to pose a credible deterrent threat, in contrast to the symbolic and non-threatening presence that characterizes traditional peacekeeping'.³³ The panel therefore suggests:

Rules of engagement should not limit contingents to stroke-for-stroke responses but should allow ripostes sufficient to silence a source of deadly fire that is directed at United Nations troops or at people they

are charged to protect and, in particularly dangerous circumstances, should not force United Nations contingents to cede the initiative to their attackers.³⁴

Although peacekeeping is being conflated with the civilian tasks of peacebuilding, the actual peacekeeping component itself is becoming more coercive. A foreign policy based on protecting human rights rather than upholding international peace will inevitably involve greater military capacity. There is also greater acceptance that participating states should be willing to accept casualties on behalf of the mandate.³⁵ Michael Walzer argues that Western governments 'cannot panic when the first soldier or the first significant number of soldiers, like the eighteen infantrymen in Somalia, are killed in a firefight'.³⁶ Nicholas Wheeler suggests that 'the duty of moral guardianship requires state leaders to spend treasure and shed blood in the name of human solidarity'.³⁷ Rearmament today has support from across the political spectrum, particularly from humanitarian NGOs who advocate a much greater international role for the Western military. A 1997 ActionAid UK briefing paper argues that UN forces should 'not just dish out relief in proportion to needs, but also dish out criticism (advocacy) or military bombardment in proportion to human rights wrong doing'.³⁸ Oxfam's 1998 submission to the UK Select Committee on Defence called for much greater military commitment abroad: 'We have developed quite firm views on what does and does not constitute an appropriate role for the military... Oxfam's starting point is that Britain should have a substantial role to play.'³⁹ It is on these grounds that the radical advocates of the people-centred approach have taken over from the conservative right as the biggest advocates of increased military spending.⁴⁰

Peacekeeping is also being transformed in another direction. Today, the UN argues that the traditional neutrality of the 'Blue Helmets' should be abandoned:

Impartiality for such operations must therefore mean adherence to the principles of the Charter and to the objectives of a mandate that is rooted in those Charter principles. Such impartiality is not the same as neutrality or equal treatment of all parties in all cases for all time, which can amount to a policy of appeasement. In some cases, local parties consist not of moral equals but of obvious aggressors and victims, and peacekeepers may not only be operationally justified in using force but morally compelled to do so.⁴¹

For the Brahimi Panel, the former position of equal treatment of all parties 'can in the best case result in ineffectiveness and in the worst may amount

to complicity with evil'.⁴² This repeats the critique of human rights advocates, like Michael Ignatieff, who condemned the UN's intervention in Sierra Leone in the *New York Times*:

To keep the peace here is to ratify the conquests of evil. It is time to bury peacekeeping before it buries the UN... Where peace has to be enforced rather than maintained, what's required are combat-capable warriors under robust rules of engagement, with armour, ammunition and intelligence capability and a single line of command to a national government or regional alliance... [T]he international community has to take sides and do so with crushing force.⁴³

This militarization of peacekeeping runs counter to the traditional role of the UN. As Michael T. Corgan, a former political and military planner for NATO who is now an associate professor of international relations at Boston University, notes: 'We have to recognize that peacemaking essentially involves war. You must be able to convincingly threaten full combat even if it doesn't come to that, and you incur many of the costs of a war.'⁴⁴ The Brahimi Panel recognizes 'that the United Nations does not wage war'.⁴⁵ This means that peacekeeping will be increasingly shifted from UN control to that of NATO or other 'coalitions of the willing': 'Where enforcement action is required, it has consistently been entrusted to coalitions of willing States, with the authorization of the Security Council under Chapter VII of the Charter.'⁴⁶

As could be seen over Kosovo, once the threat of force is used to apply pressure to the parties, the conflict is internationalized and there is pressure to apply force to maintain international credibility. The UK government Select Committee on Defence notes 'the very act of introducing British forces into a situation transforms any crisis from the UK's perspective into something more fundamental, because, if nothing else, the safety and reputation of the UK's Armed Forces are then at stake.'⁴⁷ Once a conflict, like Kosovo, is internationalized, it is qualitatively transformed: '[I]t is not only the security of Europe, in its widest sense that is at risk in Kosovo. So too is the credibility of NATO in its newly developing role, and so too is the effectiveness of the United Nations.'⁴⁸ Rhetorically Western leaders still uphold the UN Charter's primary aim of protecting humanity from 'the scourge of war'.⁴⁹ Yet military intervention is becoming far from an 'option of last resort'. The militarized peacekeeping mandates designed to be able to deploy overwhelming force will inevitably raise expectations and place UN and NATO credibility on the line more often. Despite the rhetorical repetition of the agreement to use force only as a last resort, as the UK government asserts 'the threat of it may be needed at an early stage in a conflict'.⁵⁰

Peacebuilding

Until the end of the Cold War, UN peace operations for the most part had no direct peacebuilding mandates to build the 'foundations of something that is more than just the absence of war'.⁵¹ This new programme is part of a people-centred framework in which the human rights component of a peace operation is seen as critical to its long-term effectiveness.⁵² The Brahimi Panel defined peacebuilding as including, but not limited to: rebuilding civil society; strengthening the rule of law, through police restructuring and judicial and penal reform; improving the human rights situation by monitoring, educating and investigating abuses; democratic development including election and media regulation; tackling corruption; HIV/AIDS education and control; and promoting conflict resolution and reconciliation.⁵³

Under these broad-ranging powers of international regulation, the UN panel emphasized the importance of the reform and restructuring of the penal and judicial system in post-conflict societies, and the need to make available international judicial experts, penal experts and human rights specialists. The panel also suggested a 'doctrinal shift' in the role of civilian police in peace operations.⁵⁴ In the past this role was a monitoring one, documenting behaviour and by their presence attempting to discourage unacceptable behaviour. This was now seen as a 'somewhat narrow perspective' more akin to old peacekeeping needs than to peacebuilding.⁵⁵ Instead the panel report proposed that the UN police should reform, retrain and restructure local police forces and have the capacity to take over their role if necessary, responding to civil disorder. It also suggested that the UN draw up a 'justice package' with an interim legal code to avoid the difficulties of establishing 'applicable law'. This would solve the problems of Kosovo where the UN was formally working under Federal Yugoslav law but allowed their appointed judges to overrule it while NATO troops and UN police initially worked according to their own conflicting national laws.⁵⁶

The panel also emphasized the danger of seeing the first post-war elections as the end of the peacebuilding process. It warned that 'elections merely ratify a tyranny of the majority' until democratization and civil society-building processes have been completed and a 'culture of respect for human rights' has been established.⁵⁷ Because of the perceived lack of legitimacy of post-conflict governments, elected or not, the panel suggested that the economic reconstruction programme should be kept under UN control, with no direct aid or investment, as the UN 'should be considered the focal point for peacebuilding activities by the donor community'.⁵⁸ These extended peacebuilding mandates are taking the UN into new areas

of direct political and social regulation, where the mission goals are much less clear than in traditional politically-neutral mandates.

Conflict Prevention

During the Cold War, long-term conflict prevention attempted to reinforce political solutions, usually through diplomatic initiatives. As the Brahimi Panel note: 'Such preventive action is, by definition, a low profile activity; when successful, it may go unnoticed altogether.'⁵⁹ The softly-softly diplomatic approach is today eschewed for the more public approach followed traditionally by NGOs. The UN Secretary-General argues that one solution to the root cause of conflict is the promotion of human rights and that 'the best preventive strategy in this context is transparency: "naming and shaming"'.⁶⁰ The task of 'naming and shaming' countries means that 'civil society actors have an enormous role to play', alongside states and international bodies, in gathering information and publicizing abuses.

According conflict prevention with the higher political profile attached to 'naming and shaming' may well generate publicity for the problems of vulnerable people but the Secretary-General also recognizes potential problems in that this framework 'might encourage secessionist movements deliberately to provoke governments...in order to trigger external interventions'.⁶¹ The double-edged nature of the people-centred approach in this area reflects both the potential dangers in politicizing UN peace operations and the clear contrast between a people-centred approach, which tends to internationalize conflict situations, and the former approach, which prioritized local solutions based on consensus between the parties.

Implications for Sovereignty

The problems of renegotiating the UN's previous framework of non-intervention and state sovereignty are highlighted in the Millennium Report's discussion of the 'dilemma of intervention'.⁶² The Millennium Report sets out clearly why the UN believes that its previous principle of non-intervention in the sovereign affairs of states should be overturned. The Secretary-General acknowledges concerns 'that the concept of "humanitarian intervention" could become a cover for gratuitous interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states'.⁶³ He also recognizes that 'there is little consistency in the practice of intervention...except that weak states are far more likely to be subjected to it than strong ones'.⁶⁴ He recognizes 'both the force and the importance of these arguments' and accepts 'that the principles of sovereignty and non-interference offer vital protection to small and weak states'.⁶⁵

But in response to these objections General-Secretary Kofi Annan asks, if the current principles of sovereignty and non-intervention stand, 'how should we respond to a Rwanda, to a Srebrenica – to gross and systematic violations of human rights that offend every precept of our common humanity?'⁶⁶ Intervention may be politically difficult, 'but surely no legal principle – not even sovereignty – can ever shield crimes against humanity'.⁶⁷ Where such crimes occur the Security Council has a 'moral duty' to act on behalf of the international community.⁶⁸

The problem is in defining where the balance between protecting human rights and sovereignty lies. During the Cold War, genocide was considered to be the only grounds for international intervention in internal affairs. Today this is no longer the case. Security Council resolution 1296 (2000) establishes that the targeting of civilians in armed conflict and the denial of humanitarian access to civilian populations afflicted by war may themselves constitute threats to international peace and security and thereby trigger intervention.⁶⁹ The question of where to draw the line of sovereignty is the central question facing international peacekeeping today. The dynamic of the people-centred approach is continually to renegotiate the boundaries of state sovereignty. As Prime Minister Tony Blair stated in his keynote speech in Chicago on 22 April 1999: 'The most pressing foreign policy problem we face is to identify the circumstances in which we should get involved in other peoples' conflicts'.⁷⁰ The assumption is that it is an increasingly open question whether major Western powers decide to respect sovereignty or to intervene in the cause of protecting the vulnerable. This is an evolving process because the demands of human rights advocates for the protection of vulnerable people and groups will inevitably conflict with the rights of states to assert control over internal affairs.

Once the idea of sovereignty and self-government is put to question in poorer, less developed regions, the people-centred approach legitimizes increasing levels of international involvement at every stage of the peace process. The Brahimi Panel criticizes traditional peacekeeping, because it treats 'symptoms' rather than the sources of conflict, and therefore 'has no built-in exit strategy' and is 'slow to make progress', leaving traditional peacekeepers in place for 10, 20, 30 or even 50 years in Cyprus, the Middle East and India/Pakistan.⁷¹ However, there is little evidence that increased levels of international interference in peace settlements or in post-conflict rebuilding are any more effective in resolving the 'sources' of conflict or in offering a more effective 'exit strategy'.

The logical conclusion of the focus on extending peacebuilding regulation in post-conflict societies is the creation of new protectorate powers of transitional civil administration headed by the UN. The first fully developed peacebuilding mandate of this sort was established in 1995, when

the UN took over the civil administration of Bosnia, followed in 1999 by civil administration mandates in Kosovo and then East Timor. The Brahimi Report offers a positive vision of the future:

We see an SRSR [Special Representative of the Secretary-General] ending a mission well accomplished, having given the people of a country the opportunity to do for themselves what they could not do before: to build and hold onto peace, to find reconciliation, to strengthen democracy, to secure human rights.⁷²

The UN's starting assumption is that the 'people' at the centre of their intervention cannot build peace and reconciliation or secure democracy or human rights 'for themselves'. However, the experience of Bosnia, Kosovo and East Timor suggests that this approach, which assumes that people lack an adequate capacity for political problem-solving, is in danger of excluding people of the region from the political process of peacebuilding and reconstruction.

As the Brahimi Panel noted, the UN administrators have been given responsibility for micro-managing these societies: making and enforcing the law, establishing customs services, collecting business and personal taxes, attracting foreign investment, adjudicating property disputes, reconstructing and operating public utilities, creating a banking system and running the schools.⁷³ This diminished view of the capacity of people in the region, and exaggerated view of the benign civilizing powers of external administration, can only lead to the increasing accumulation of powers in the hands of international regulators appointed by the UN, reducing the formal (political) and informal (social and economic) mechanisms available for people in these states to take responsibility for negotiating and maintaining a sustainable peace settlement.⁷⁴ There appears to be little incentive to roll-back international regulative mechanisms, leaving the people-centred approach of the UN unable to lay the basis of any long-term solution accountable to the people of the region.

These UN missions have revealed that the peacebuilding project of protecting and empowering the vulnerable is highly likely to be just as long term as that of traditional peacekeeping, the major difference being that during the people-centred process state sovereignty is effectively surrendered by the post-conflict state. This brings into question the claims to empowerment, democracy and rights, which figure prominently in the arguments of the advocates of this approach. In fact, there can be little doubt that far from empowering people in non-Western states, the extension of peacebuilding mandates heralds a public retreat from the principles of self-determination and democracy. The Brahimi Panel's suggestion that the UN Security Council should in fact establish a centre of responsibility for the

tasks of transitional administration to manage future direct mandates indicates that it sees a long-term future for the new people-centred mandate system. This perspective of a return to colonial protectorates is supported by the British government, which suggests that 'there is a strong case for reassessing the role of the Trusteeship Council', suspended since the last UN protectorate Palau was granted a form of independence in 1994.⁷⁵

Implications for the UN

For many commentators the weakening of the concept of state sovereignty would indicate a stronger UN. This would appear to be borne out in the extension of the UN role from light peacekeeping to extended and multi-functional peacebuilding. Nevertheless, the relationship between the sphere of state sovereignty, particularly of smaller and more marginal states, and the sphere of UN decision-making control is not necessarily a zero-sum one. While the people-centred approach raises questions over the extended role of international regulation in post-conflict societies, the critique of sovereignty and the political sphere in conflict-risk states raises more fundamental questions about the role of the UN in regulating questions of war and peace. The central contradiction at the heart of UN reform is how to develop a people-centred approach within the UN's structures, which were designed and legitimized in 1945 on the basis of an entirely different set of assumptions.

The international call for a focus on people-centred approaches inevitably calls into question the role and standing of the UN itself. As leading human rights advocate Geoffrey Robertson notes, it is not just the UN's peace operations that are problematic, but its whole organizational structure, based on post-Second World War ideas of state sovereignty and political equality, rather than people-centred human rights:

It still talks, illogically, of violation of 'state rights', when it is *human* rights that are being violated. Some of its classic doctrines – sovereign and diplomatic immunity, non-intervention in internal affairs, non-compulsory submission to the ICJ [International Court of Justice], equality of voting in the General Assembly – continue to damage the human rights cause.⁷⁶

A broader institutional change is heralded in the demands posed by the transformation in UN peacekeeping towards greater military preparedness. This means that the peace operations around the world will have to be increasingly coordinated by regional and sub-regional organizations, which ensure their participants are carefully vetted. The Brahimi Report suggests that 'caution seems appropriate, because military resources and capability

are unevenly distributed around the world, and troops in the most crisis-prone areas are often less prepared for the demands of modern peacekeeping than is the case elsewhere'.⁷⁷ The question of the suitability of many UN member states for taking on the military tasks involved in the new peace operations is also raised in the UK Government Joint Consultative Committee Report on UN Reform, which argues:

[T]he UN's reaction to human rights abuses or conflict situations has sometimes been slow, inconsistent and ill coordinated... Those nations with the capacity to support peacekeeping or other operations, whether it be financially, logistically or through the provision of high quality forces and equipment, need to respond swiftly and effectively.⁷⁸

The shift towards a greater stake in peace operations for 'coalitions of the willing' reflects the increasing willingness of Western states to undertake peacekeeping tasks independently of the UN. This was highlighted by the launch of NATO's new 'strategic concept', at the Alliance's 50th Anniversary Summit in Washington in late April 1999. US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott explained: 'We must be careful not to subordinate NATO to any other international body or compromise the integrity of its command structure. We will try to act in concert with other organizations, and with respect for their principles and purposes. But the Alliance must reserve the right and freedom to act when its members, by consensus, deem it necessary.'⁷⁹ Lord George Robertson, Secretary-General of NATO, has argued that the organization needs an enhanced military capability precisely to take on 'non-Article 5 crisis management operations', actions not related to NATO members' self-defence and therefore neither defined nor limited in geographical scope by the NATO Charter.⁸⁰ NATO's lead is being followed by the European Union's common security and defence policy, which is concerned less with collective defence than developing the capacity for peacekeeping intervention abroad in situations where NATO declines to get involved.⁸¹ The decline of the UN as the central peacekeeping institution is highlighted by the fact that 77 per cent of UN troops are currently contributed by developing countries, and no developed country contributes troops to the most difficult UN missions in Sierra Leone or the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while the major powers, like the US, UK, France and Germany, contribute sizeable forces to NATO-led operations.⁸²

Ominously, for the future of the UN as the key institution in upholding international peace and security, the Brahimi Panel indicates that changes to the Security Council procedures are necessary to ensure more effective peace operations: 'The tradition of the recitation of statements, followed by

a painstaking process of achieving consensus, places considerable emphasis on the diplomatic process over operational product'.⁸³ The panel argues that political consensus in the Security Council has been a barrier to effective mandates and action:

As a political body, the Security Council focuses on consensus-building, even though it can take decisions with less than unanimity. But the compromises required to build consensus can be made at the expense of specificity, and the resulting ambiguity can have serious consequences in the field... While it acknowledges the utility of political compromise in many cases, the panel comes down in this case on the side of clarity, especially for operations that will deploy into dangerous circumstances.⁸⁴

The panel suggests that maintaining the principle of political consensus will hamper more militarized peacekeeping, in which case it would be better for the Council to refrain from mandating such a mission. The UK government is also in favour of change and advocates the expansion of the Security Council to include Germany, Japan and additional members from Latin America, Africa and Asia, as new permanent members, as well as the addition of another four non-permanent members, increasing the size of the Council from 15 to 24.⁸⁵ The UK argues that the expansion of the Security Council will increase its legitimacy and 'allow us the opportunity to reassess the circumstances under which a veto can be used'.⁸⁶ It would seem likely, considering the UN Secretary-General's view that the Security Council has a 'moral duty' to act on behalf of the international community in the cause of human rights and that 'no legal principle' should stand in the way, that the use of veto powers will be restricted in the face of serious human rights concerns.⁸⁷ Through the prioritization of 'clarity' over 'consensus', where there is no unanimity in a crisis situation, as over Kosovo, reform looks set to legitimize unilateral action by 'coalitions of the willing', which would otherwise be illegal under international law.

Conclusion

The reform of the Security Council and the inevitable abolition of the powers of veto in situations held to be of serious human rights violation, suggest that the UN will no longer be bound to uphold an international consensus on military intervention. The end of consensus means that dominant world powers, particularly the remaining superpower, the US, will be increasingly able to dictate whether or not military intervention is necessary. It thus seems likely that the UN will be further sidelined when it comes to questions of war or peace and that its formal role of being able to

hold major world powers to account will be increasingly eroded. This shift will institutionalize the changed balance of power between the UN and NATO, and the declining political influence of non-Western states within the UN, since the end of the Cold War. The transformation of the UN's peacekeeping role to that of the civilian rather than military tasks of peace operations will confirm the position of the UN as the handmaiden to NATO, the pre-eminent 'coalition of the willing', rather than the authorizing authority. While NATO powers will have an increasingly free hand to define the limits of sovereignty in the non-Western world, and intervene when they consider it necessary, the UN will have the task of cleaning up afterwards and will have to take responsibility for the unrealistic expectations raised by the growing internationalization of conflict situations.

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