

Is Task-sharing the Answer to UN Peacekeeping Problems?

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“It is increasingly apparent that the United Nations cannot address every potential and actual conflict troubling the world.” (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1995a)

The end of the Cold War marked the onset of the transformation of the UN into its now active role of maintaining international peace and security. The ideological rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union had constrained the Security Council and it had immobilized the UN's preventive diplomatic and peacekeeping functions so extensively that in the 1980s, faith in the world organization had reached its low-point (Knight, 1996:31). The eventual breakdown of the Soviet Union has freed the UN of some of its restraints. However, it has also allowed for the surfacing of violent conflicts and political transformations around the globe (ibid:32). Furthermore, globalization -fostered particularly through instant communication on a mass scale- is believed to have created the perception of a 'global citizenship' in the minds of people, altering expectations towards supranational institutions and increasing empathy towards conflict in foreign countries (Bell, 1993:176). The combination of these factors has spurred interest in the UN peacekeeping to a point that demand has outstripped the organization's capacity to supply. As Weiss (1998:xi) notes: “The clearest diagnosis of the world organization's ills after its 50th anniversary is over-extension”. Furthermore, failure of the UN to resolve conflicts in for example Yugoslavia and Rwanda (Schmidl, 2001:65), lead to disillusionment in the organization's abilities to effectively maintain peace. By the end of the 1990s, trust in the UN had dropped to “almost Cold War levels” (Tascan 1997:491).

This essay examines if task-sharing with regional organizations could be the solution to UN peacekeeping problems. This requires firstly a clarification of the concepts “task-sharing”, “regional organizations” and “peacekeeping”. The essay then assesses whether the UN peacekeeping record is actually in need of improvement. Upon demonstrating the mixed results of UN peace operations, the essay discusses the reasons behind UN peacekeeping problems and it outlines the possible advantages and disadvantages of delegating peace enforcement entirely to regional organizations. Through case studies of Haiti and Liberia, the essay illustrates the advantages of joint peacekeeping missions between the UN and respective regional organizations, but also the need for developing yet more rigorous mechanisms for governing a successful cooperation. In conclusion, the essay argues that task-sharing is not *the* answer to UN peacekeeping problems, as there would be other alternatives such as launching UN reforms; however, task-sharing as joint operations may enhance successful peacekeeping and could be a step towards making actions of the international community more consensual.

Regional task-sharing, also called regional subcontracting or subsidiarity, describes the delegation of peace-enforcement operations to regional organizations as outlined by Chapter VIII, Article 53, of the UN Charter (UN, 2007a). Article 53 encourages the Security Council to utilize “regional arrangements or agencies for enforcement action under its authority” (UN, 2007b). Due to the vague wording of the Article, this essay treats task-sharing in a broad sense, including also the practice of regional organizations receiving an ex-post facto mandate by the Security Council for a peace enforcement missions. In socio-philosophical terms, subsidiarity is a principle for dealing with “social disorder” (Knight, 1996:44). This essay examines whether task-sharing is an appropriate organizing device for addressing states of social disorder.

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The UN Charter does not clearly define regional organizations, but considers them regional security arrangements rather than defense alliances (Peck, 2001:562). In practice, these are arrangements such as the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) (Weiss, 1998:xiii). Furthermore, ad hoc coalitions of the willing, and increasingly, NGOs have taken on an important role in UN peacekeeping (Smith and Weiss, 1998). Through its examples of UN peacekeeping operations in Liberia and Haiti, which took place in cooperation with ECOWAS and OAS respectively, this essay focuses mainly on UN task-sharing with regional security arrangements.

The UN currently defines peacekeeping as a UN operation that “with the consent of the conflicting parties, implements or monitors arrangements relating to the control of conflicts and their resolution, or ensures the safe delivery of humanitarian relief (UN, 2007c).” Neither the Charter nor the Security Council had clearly defined peacekeeping until recently; only in the 1990s written definitions and a conceptual framework began to develop (Griffin, 1999:5). Some (ibid.) suggest that peacekeeping means whatever appears in the mandate for a peace support operation. However, the scope for mandates of peacekeeping missions has been expanding ever since the ending of the Cold War, which is explored further in the section below.

Before exploring the suggested need for subcontracted peacekeeping missions, it is useful to provide sections outlining the overall UN peacekeeping record and sections presenting reasons behind the shortcomings of UN peacekeeping operations. Between 1945 and 1997, the UN conducted 41 peacekeeping missions (Bratt, 1996:64) of increasing complexity. During the Cold War, peacekeeping entailed the consensual “post-truce interposition” of UN forces, which has also been labeled “first generation” peacekeeping (Griffin, 1999:2). The concept has broadened to include services to areas such as “human rights, local security, elections, and the re-integration of combatants to civilian life” (UN, 2007c), making peacekeeping a more holistic and possibly more effective undertaking in terms of establishing peace. Depending on their degree of complexity, these operations are also classified as „second“ and „third generation“ peacekeeping (Griffin, 1999:2). Regardless of its scope, three key principles have to be adhered to should a peacekeeping mission be successful: consent of the parties involved, impartiality of the peacekeeping force, and a limited use of force for self-defense (Boutros-Ghali, 1995b:33). It should be noted that these principles have proven difficult to be maintained by UN-peacekeeping forces throughout their missions (Griffin, 1999:8).

Assessing how successful UN peacekeeping generally is has been no clear-cut undertaking, as there has been a prolonged failure to conceptualize peacekeeping success (Bratt, 1996:65). A conceptual framework however is crucial both for policy making in regard to future peacekeeping and also for evaluating UN task-sharing. Evaluated against Bratt’s (1996) framework -which assesses peacekeeping operations in terms of their mandate performance, their degree of conflict resolution facilitation, their success in conflict containment and their ability of limiting casualties- UN peacekeeping demonstrates a mixed record in terms of success: of the 41 missions, there have been as many failures as moderate or complete successes (ibid.:78). This indicates that the UN tends to have problems fulfilling its missions. Improving the record would be desirable indeed should faith in the UN as an effective peacekeeper be maintained.

Nevertheless, there is a strong case for why the UN should continue peacekeeping operations: firstly, the UN still has an unrivalled pool of both financial resources and of expertise in the coordination and conduction of peacekeeping operations (Alagappa, 1998:4). Secondly, a peacekeeping operation led by the UN holds an unmatched legitimacy. Finally, UN missions are perceived to be less prone to partiality when controlling a conflict as for example regional actors (ibid.). As has been recognized by Boutros-Ghali (1995b), this last point is crucial should a peacekeeping operation be successful. In these regards, the UN has got an edge over regional organizations, which are characterized by limitations in crucial areas that are discussed further below. The UN has furthermore tried to improve the record by introducing several mechanisms to speed up the process of troop deployment (Griffin, 1999:16). These mechanisms included for example a multinational stand-by force (ibid.). There are however two major aspects stifling the UN’s aspirations towards more effective peacekeeping: lacking financial resources and the nature of the Security Council. These are assessed in the following section.

In 1992, Boutros-Ghali noted that the post-Cold War era was characterized by problems regarding the “logistics, equipment, personnel and finance” of increasingly demanded peacekeeping missions, “all of which could be

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corrected if Member States so wished and were ready to make the necessary resources available.” The political will of member states to match the approval of peacekeeping operations with adequate financial and material support and their will to support a stand-by force appear to have been weak: in 1995(b), Boutros-Ghali diagnosed a “financial crisis”, particularly affecting the deployment, funding and training of peacekeeping troops. This resulted in a possibly preventable loss of human life and it also causes “continuing damage to the credibility (...) of the Organization as a whole when the Council adopts decisions that cannot be carried out because the necessary troops are not forthcoming (Boutros-Ghali 1995b:99).” Two years on, the situation had not improved: Kofi Annan (1997:106) reported that “the complexity of the peacekeeping mandates (...) and the lack of sufficient resources and political will to implement them has undermined United Nations efforts”.

The nature of the Security Council also has proven counterproductive regarding peacekeeping. Article 24 of Chapter V makes it clear that the primary responsibility for peace enforcement missions lies with the Council, and according to Article 53, Chapter VIII “no enforcement action shall be taken under regional arrangements or by regional agencies without the authorization of the Security Council (UN, 2007b)”. This clearly puts the world organization on top of the formal hierarchy of peacekeeping enforcement. However, since 1945, more than 100 major conflicts around the world have claimed over 20 million fatalities- and until 1990 the Security Council had vetoed 279 times against peacekeeping operations (Boutros-Ghali, 1992:14). With only five members holding veto-powers, the Council is considered rather unrepresentative (Peck, 2001:577). The question if decisions over life-saving missions should depend on the inclinations of five countries becomes even more critical upon examining the reasons behind the vetoes. China for example initially vetoed the peacekeeping mission to Haiti in 1993 on the basis that the Haitian government had sympathized with Taiwan (Berman, 1998:6). This indicates that Council members could cast vetoes “out of a desire to settle political scores (ibid:4)”. Considering that in order for a peacekeeping mission to succeed it requires the also strong support by the Security Council (Karns and Mingst, 1994:193), the dependency of countries in crisis on the Council becomes even more critical.

These points lead the essay to argue that task-sharing would not be **the** answer to UN peacekeeping problems, as there are clearly alternatives: bringing member-states to pay up and reforming the Security Council into a more transparent and representative institution would probably greatly alleviate the problems. However, considering the complications involved in these two undertakings, the essay considers the potential of task-sharing for enhancing peacekeeping success in the following sections. Subcontracting peacekeeping entirely to organizations in respective regions would reduce task-sharing to the UN mandating a peace enforcement mission. Whether this interpretation is desirable is explored further below.

It should be made clear why principally, regionalizing peacekeeping receives support. Boutros-Ghali (1992:64) sees the potential contribution of regional organizations in that they could “lighten the burden of the Council”. This notion has been confirmed by former Secretary-General Kofi Annan (1997) in his “Programme for Reform“, where he acknowledges that “ad hoc coalitions of the willing offer the most effective deterrent to aggression or the escalation or spread of an ongoing conflict”.

Sometimes, regional arrangements possess indeed greater practical operational capabilities than the Council (Smith and Weiss, 1998:236). Due to their cultural and geographical proximity to the conflict, regional organizations are also deemed more likely to understand the factual background of disputes and to share the applicable norms and procedures (Tascan, 1997:491). This might make peacekeeping efforts more accepted by the conflicting parties involved. For example, the OAS is perceived by the Latin American States as having the chief competence over hemispheric matters. This makes it difficult for the UN to be perceived as ‘legitimately’ investigating an inter-American problem by Latin Americans unless the OAS had referred the conflict (ibid:489). A study by the Fund for Peace (2001) also revealed that many Africans tend to trust more in the ability and willingness of sub-regional African organizations to intervene on their behalf than in the UN. Subcontracting peacekeeping to regional organizations might therefore help strengthening local identities and capacities.

There are, however normative as well as practical problems associated with interpreting Article 53 such that the UN is reduced to passing peacekeeping mandates. It opens the debate over the normative authority of the UN in the international community, touching upon rivalries between the UN and regional powers (Tuscan, 1997:491).

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Furthermore, it is suspected that the Council's inclination towards formal subcontracting is not always well-intentioned, but rather motivated by the "desire to turn a blind eye" to a particular conflict-corner in the world (Berman, 1998:3). The limitations of regional organizations are a further reason to be sceptical of this approach: Firstly, "none of [the regional organizations] ha[ve] yet developed a capacity which matches that of the United Nations (Boutros-Ghali, 1995b:87)". Limited access to resources and experienced personnel stifle successful peacekeeping mission (Tascan, 1997:491). Crucially, regional organizations also lack the "moral and legal authority of a world body" (Dorn, 1998). This could become especially problematic when considering that while regional security arrangements -based on an identified common threat- are efficient when acting against external attacks (Alagappa, 1998:10), the basic pillars of regional organizations such as OAS are state sovereignty and non-intervention. This has traditionally excluded regional coalitions from entering into intra-state conflicts. Today, the vast majority of global conflicts take place within states, reflected by 82% of the peacekeeping operations established since January 1992, relating to intra-state conflicts (Boutros-Ghali, 1995b:11). Thus, the clause of non-intervention becomes a stumbling block to pacifying a region (Peck, 2001:564). The UN could be perceived as more legitimate when taking on the precarious task of positioning peacekeeping forces in intra-state conflict, also in case not all conflicting parties consent to the peacekeeping force. Considering possible tendencies toward a greater acceptance of human intervention in the future, this point would be a good case against regionalizing peacekeeping as it could open a space for humanitarian interventions underpinned by ulterior motives of the intervening organization. Due to their geographic proximity to the conflict area, regional organizations possibly tend to react to regional conflicts based on "narrow national (...) self-interest" (Dorn, 1998). For example, personal relationships between leaders of a conflicting party and the peacekeeping mission, or possible national interests other than preventing a conflict-spillover could quickly erode the perception of impartiality of the peacekeeping force (ibid.). This ties into the concern that regional arrangements tend to be influenced and employed by a regional hegemon for their self-interest (Peck, 2001:578). How these skepticisms are grounded in reality is well illustrated by the "peacekeeping" attempt by ECOWAS in the Liberia conflict. When troops under rebel leader Charles Taylor attempted to topple the Liberian president, ECOWAS employed an ex-post facto sanctioned inexperienced peacekeeping force to restore social order. The regional hegemon leading the operation was Nigeria, which at that time was run by a dictator who had personal interests in swaying the conflict to his and his allied friends' benefits (Adibe, 1997). The mission's impartiality was therefore quickly eroded (Adibe, 1997:482), and some argue the operation was never intended to be neutral (Berman, 1998:8). ECOWAS did not only fail to resolve the conflict, it exacerbated it: before their intervention, there were 5,000 fatalities; afterwards, the number of deaths rose to more than 150,000 (ibid.:9). Only when resources had dissipated, the conflict was referred to the UN (Adibe, 1997:471).

Nevertheless, from the 1990s onwards, peacekeeping has shifted towards the regionalization of many aspects of peacekeeping, which has also been labeled "fourth generation" peacekeeping (Griffin, 1999:4). Alagappa (1998:3) argues that regional sub-contracting could be the answer to the increasing operational, financial and political problems of the UN to conduct peacekeeping missions. Considering how the financial crisis of the UN affects peacekeeping as outlined in the sections above, a more efficient international division of labor and distribution of costs seem sensible and necessary (Smith and Weiss, 1998:227). However, it has also been demonstrated that simply mandating peacekeeping operations to regional organizations is critical. When assessing the advantages and disadvantages of both UN-peacekeeping and regional peacekeeping, the complementary nature of both levels of operation becomes obvious. This essay therefore argues that task-sharing is not to be dismissed per se, but that certain forms of UN task-sharing could make peacekeeping operations more efficient. The UN could engage increasingly in joint operations with regional arrangements, a method that has been considered a "possible model for the future (Boutros-Ghali, 1995b:86)".

An example illustrating the potential of joint peacekeeping is the UN peacekeeping operation in Haiti in 1993 that was deployed at the request by former Haitian President Aristide (Alagappa, 1998:3). The staffing, direction and financing was shared between the UN and the OAS (Boutros-Ghali, 1995b:86). It was a subsequent operation, with an OAS civilian mission restoring the basic order in Haiti being replaced by a UN/OAS mission (MICIVIH), monitoring the human rights situation and the elections (Tascan, 1997:498). How successful the operation was in terms of restoring long-term peace is debatable, as clearly conflict in Haiti has continued to simmer and to erupt ever since 1993. However, it could be regarded as successful in indicated a move away from the universal-regional dichotomy. OAS and the UN used to regard each other as rivals, but the Haiti experience suggested it was more effective to work

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together (ibid.:505). However, UN task-sharing remains far from being clear-cut, as demonstrated in the section below.

The relationship between the UN and regional organization has generally been tense. Although powerful regional arrangements have acknowledged the UN on top of the hierarchy, there is no explicit admittance of the UN into national security issues (Smith and Weiss, 1998:229). Furthermore, due to the vague formulation of Article 53 regarding the nature of regional organizations, regional arrangements may “find themselves without a clear understanding of the limits of their authority (ibid.:235).” Essentially, a theory with clear guideline concerning successful task-sharing and peacekeeping is still missing. Both the Haiti case and the peacekeeping experience in Liberia could serve for deducing crucial mechanisms for working towards a successful joint task-sharing concept. The Haiti success arose partly from clear lines of communication and written agreements defining the relationship between OAS and the UN (Griffin, 1999:24). The Liberian experience might be an example of how *not* to conduct joint missions: when the UN joined forces with ECOWAS in Liberia, the operation still ended unsuccessfully. The fact that the UN did not formulate an independent initiative and endorsed continuously failing agreements negotiated by ECOWAS instead, contributed greatly to the failure of the mission and increased doubts in UN capacities (Adibe, 1997:484). Additionally, the parallel nature of the operation had blurred the hierarchy of command, stifling effective task-sharing on the ground (ibid.). This demonstrates the need for: mechanisms to ensure a clear division of labour, an unambiguous outline of the hierarchy and established channels of communication- prior to the mission. This might also clarify issues of accountability of the actors. However, considering the difficulty to understand the limitations of regional organizations and the UN in practice, a clear division of labour and the development of rules governing the relationship prior to a peacekeeping operation appears rather challenging.

There are further issues to be addressed. The example of ECOWAS’ ex-post facto sanctioned peacekeeping failure shows that there should be a mechanism for the UN to decide when to delegate a peace enforcement operation and to whom (Adibe, 1997:484-485). Furthermore, considering that ECOWAS forces were looting during their peacekeeping mission (Dorn, 1998), the question arises how the UN should act towards a peacekeeping force that becomes involved in committing atrocities themselves. Thus, there is still much to be done in terms of conceptualising the cooperation and peacekeeping of subcontracted missions. It has been suggested however that a preconceived template might not even be desirable, as “completely new forms of international cooperation resulted not on the basis of a blueprint, but in reaction to developments in the field (Smith and Weiss, 1998:230)”. Boutros-Ghali (1995b) stated that “[g]iven (...) the variety of forms that cooperation with the United Nations is already taking, it would not be appropriate to try to establish a universal model” for the relationship between regional organizations and the UN. Finally, the notion exists that empirical evidence for generalizing task-sharing efficiency is yet insufficient (Tacan, 1997:491).

Upon evaluating the evidence concerning task-sharing -both in a broad and a more specific sense- against the background of the question whether task-sharing would be the answer to UN peacekeeping problems, four points become noteworthy: Firstly, delegating all peacekeeping responsibilities entirely to regional organizations would not be a solution to UN’s peacekeeping problems, if these problems are defined as the inability to maintain peace while fulfilling the conditions of Bratt’s (1996) framework of peacekeeping-success. Secondly, task-sharing in the form of joint missions, such as giving the UN a role as an accompanying monitoring body, could be promising for UN peacekeeping- if it was possible to establish clear mechanisms and a conceptual framework that govern the cooperation. Thirdly, this essay argues no peacekeeping operation can be successful if there is insufficient financial support due to lacking political will of the member states or a division within the Security Council over the mission. In fact, if peacekeeping success was mainly dependant on unanimous Council support and sufficient funding, task-sharing would *not* be the only answer, as has already been explained in a previous section. Peacekeeping does not seem to be a priority when it comes to member-state support and the Council’s delegating of missions could be motivated by concerns other than maintaining international peace. However, compared to reforming the Security Council and financial obligations of member states, making task-sharing efficient seems more easily accomplishable. There is a further rationale for task-sharing, even should financial support abound: success has proven to depend on the strong support of all parties involved” (Karns and Mingst, 1994:208). Working with regional troops could possibly provide more direct communications channels to local communities (Griffin, 1997:20), increasing their understanding of the peacekeeping mandate, which might lead to greater overall consent.

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Throughout this essay it has been suggested that peacekeeping problems could already arise from the vague or changing concepts of task-sharing, regional organizations and peacekeeping. It has been demonstrated that UN peacekeeping would indeed require an improvement, and that some of the reasons behind peacekeeping failures are rooted in the structural nature of member-state contributions and the Security Council. However, it has been made clear that delegating peacekeeping entirely to regional organizations would not necessarily make peacekeeping more successful, and that it would also call into question the UN's normative role as a world organization. Missions involving both the UN and a regional arrangement could enhance peacekeeping success when proper mechanisms are available for governing the cooperation and communication between the actors. Finally, the essay argued that task-sharing might be desirable for reasons other than compensating for the UN's insufficient funding. Integrating regional organizations in peacekeeping could be viewed as training regional partners increasingly needed for supplementing missions rather than as conceding authority to regional rivals. Task-sharing could have the potential to "contribute to a deeper sense of participation, consensus and democratization in international affairs (Boutros-Ghali, 1992)".

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