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The Nature of Peacekeeping

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The Nature of Peacekeeping

Fetherston, A.B. *Toward a Theory of United Nations Peacekeeping. Peace Research Report Number 31.* Bradford, UK: Department of Peace Studies, University of Bradford, February 1993.

Smith, Hugh, ed. *Peacekeeping, Challenges for the Future.* Canberra: Australia Defence Studies Centre, Australian Defence Force Academy, 1993.

Since the expansion of interest in peacekeeping that came with the United Nations post-Cold War activism, there has been an explosion of academic and other writing on the issue. In the absence of the Cold War and interest in nuclear deterrence, arms control, and East-West relations, peacekeeping, broadly defined, has become the focus of choice. Both A.B. Fetherston and Hugh Smith make quite useful contributions to this ever-expanding genre.

A.B. Fetherston makes an attempt to begin developing a "theory" of peacekeeping. In the post-Cold War era the United Nations has become involved in intra- as well as inter-state conflicts, as well as in conflicts that are deeply rooted and prolonged. In doing so the United Nations has also become heavily involved in the provision of humanitarian assistance. In the absence of guidelines from the UN Charter and any kind of past experience in this type of situation, United Nations operations have been characterized by ad hoc methods of operation and a lack of a conceptual clarity. This has resulted in the types of problems evident in some of the more troubled recent UN operations. It is this new state of affairs that prompts Fetherston to suggest that a more coherent conceptual framework for UN operations would be helpful.

Fetherston points out that, in practice, there is limited linkage between the three main functions of UN operations — peacekeeping, peace-building and peacemaking — at the macro level. At the same time, on the ground (the micro level), peacekeepers often end up performing elements of all three of these functions. There is, according to Fetherston, a clear need for greater linkage between the macro and micro levels. Fetherston then moves to examine various models of third party intervention and from them advocates the use of the "contingency" model as a way of developing a conceptual framework. Leaving aside the question of whether this is a useful approach, the use of the contingency model leads to the conclusion that much greater emphasis needs to be placed on all three functions at the micro level. That is that peacekeepers need to be more proactive about peacebuilding and peacemaking tasks in operations. They should not just fulfill the military requirements of the operation but should also contribute to resolving the conflict.

Fetherston discusses the implications this has for training peacekeepers. The author suggests the need to move beyond standard military training to ensure that peacekeepers are trained for skills that suit the broader role of conflict management.

In short, soldiers must be able to conceive of peacekeeping as something more than a purely military enterprise. This is, of course, the heart of the remarkably divisive debate about training peacekeepers. Although Fetherston's argument is coherent and logical it is unlikely to win over those who feel that the best and only training required for peacekeepers is good basic military training.

While some may criticize the analysis for its lack of reference to the constraints inherent in the UN Charter and the Organization itself, this is a thought-provoking analysis that deserves credit for moving beyond the definitional questions about what exactly constitutes peacekeeping, peace-making, peace enforcement, etc., to provide a broader conceptualization of the roles, functions and purposes involved in UN operations. Although the paper sometimes gets bogged down in discussions of theories and models, Fetherston's greatest strength is in illuminating the well-known contradictions and problems that have arisen in recent UN operations by viewing them through a different prism. Most importantly, the paper reminds us, as Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali did in *An Agenda for Peace*, that conflicts have social, economic and political roots and that all of those elements must be addressed in order to achieve a lasting peace.

The Hugh Smith volume provides a different sort of contribution. This volume, the product of a conference in June 1993, provides case studies of operations along with chapters addressing broader issues such as civil-military relations, the role of police and the role of the media. The book concludes with a look at possible future paths and challenges for UN operations. Most of the chapters are written by Australian military officers. Five chapters cover national perspectives (Indonesia, Fiji, Singapore, Thailand, and the United States) and are written by military officers from those countries. The chapters are short and straightforward — very military in style — but are effective in conveying a sense of the operations. It is especially interesting to read how decisions were made and what other experiences the officers brought to their decision making. Just as in Canada, peacekeeping is an important role for the Australian armed forces. The book, therefore, provides an interesting insight into Australian military thinking on peacekeeping issues.

One of the problems with the United Nations peacekeeping experience is that the organization itself does not undertake operational histories of each operation. In the absence of this kind of detailed study each operation begins without reference to any lessons learned from past experiences. Hopefully, the Australian example will be the beginning of a trend where case studies or operational histories are done by member states. By providing a record of their experience such studies would aid anyone working to develop ideas for making UN operations more effective and efficient.

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