

# UN Peacekeeping Operations Challenges and Opportunities for Mexico

María Cristina Rosas\*



Tomás Bravo/Reuters

The debate about Mexico participating with troops in UN peacekeeping operations has intensified in recent years. It finally entered a decisive phase after Enrique Peña Nieto announced on September 24, 2014, to the UN General Assembly that Mexico would gradually begin contributing troops to these missions.

Mexico is one of the main financial contributors to these peacekeeping missions, and in addition, it has been sporadically present with military and police contingents since the United Nations was created, plus having civilian personnel participating in these operations, for example, to lend assistance during elections.

Despite this, to date, the country has no definite policy with regard to these missions. This should change based on an evaluation of the national interest and the characteristics

and needs of the world in matters of peace and security, which should determine the contribution that Mexico could make. Domestically, now that it has been decided to involve Mexico in the peacekeeping missions with military personnel, the risks and opportunities they imply should be carefully analyzed given that these operations are dynamic and changing and today are very different from what they were originally. Before continuing, I should explain what the peacekeeping operations are, what they are for, and what they look like today.

## WHAT ARE PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS?

The UN Charter does not specify the tasks that peacekeeping troops, or Blue Berets, will carry out. The founders of the United Nations, in fact, knew that the body they were creating did not have the attributes to be able to wipe war

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\*President of the Olof Palme Center for Analysis and Research on Peace, Security, and Development, mcrosas@prodigy.net.mx.

from the face of the Earth. Therefore, in practice, they limited themselves to emphasizing that one of the new institution's main objectives was to maintain international peace and security but without identifying the mechanisms to make that a reality. This is where the concept of peacekeeping operations comes into play.<sup>1</sup> Given that eradicating conflicts would be difficult, the UN pragmatically decided to create mechanisms to mitigate them, especially when they had already broken out.<sup>2</sup> Preventive peacekeeping operations have been less frequent than those aimed at places where a conflict is already underway or where what is needed is to consolidate the peace.

In the 1990s, when peacekeeping missions were drastically on the rise, a series of documents proliferated that sought to delimit their mandate and redefine them in the light of the changes going on in the world. Suffice it to mention that, in contrast with the Cold War, when most conflicts were international, in its aftermath and until today, they are markedly domestic.

In addition, intervention for humanitarian reasons in countries suffering from violent conflicts has been consolidating in international relations as the minimalist vision of human security suggests, in light of which the international community has adopted the principle of what is called "the responsibility to protect." This means that if a state cannot or does not wish to protect its own population in the face of violent conflicts and the violation of its most fundamental human rights, it is the responsibility of the international community to intervene.<sup>3</sup> While the UN Charter itself posits the principle of non-intervention in the internal matters of states, the trend is to overlook this consideration in the face of the destruction and desolation generated by violent conflicts among the civilian population. Non-intervention is also a guiding principle of Mexico's foreign policy; for that reason, as will be seen further along, the country's participation in peacekeeping operations is only supposed to happen when the mission is in accordance with traditional usage, that is, by petition of the government of the territory where deployment is to be made and in accordance with a series of rules that should be clearly known.

In any case, the most usual definition of peacekeeping operations was articulated by former UN Under-secretary General Marrack Goulding. Briefly stated, Goulding described them as UN field operations with the consent of the interested parties to aid in controlling and resolving conflicts between them, under UN command and control, fi-

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nanced by all the member states, with military personnel, as well as other types of personnel and equipment provided voluntarily by them. These forces are to act impartially between the parties and to use the minimum amount of force necessary.<sup>4</sup> With the passage of time, however, these operations have not always stayed within these guidelines, as we will see below.

#### PEACEKEEPING MISSION STAGES

Broadly speaking, four stages of peacekeeping missions can be distinguished during their history:

1. *Between 1948 and 1988.* Classical or traditional peacekeeping operations were carried out, starting in 1948 with observers, and, during the 1956 Suez Canal crisis, peacekeeping troops were sent to situate themselves between the clashing parties. In these four decades, 13 peacekeeping operations were organized. The great powers did not participate, but rather that was left to countries like Canada, Australia, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, etc. The use of force by the Blue Berets was only justified in cases of legitimate defense and, in addition, deployment was effected with the permission of the parties in conflict.
2. *From 1988 to 1998.* The peacekeeping operations during this period should be called complex or multi-dimensional. They broadened out their tasks, going beyond the simple monitoring of the ceasefire and placing themselves between the parties in conflict, to include activities such as disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR), humanitarian aid, electoral assistance, protection of human rights, civilian policing, removal of mines, and cooperation with regional bodies. In this period, 36 operations were carried out, almost three times as many as in the Cold War years.

The kind of conflicts they were involved in were, above all, intra-state, which is why in many cases the so-called right to intervene was invoked. Thus, in contrast with the Cold War period, Blue Beret deployments in this decade took place even when the parties in conflict had not given their consent. It should be pointed out that in this period, the great powers were becoming involved directly.

3. *From 1998 to 2005.* The great powers began to withdraw after the failures and criticisms about their inability to act as impartial, efficient Blue Berets.<sup>5</sup> Certain caution was evidenced in this phase in the creation of new peacekeeping missions, and different reports were published suggesting the need to “learn from the mistakes,” putting a priority on preventive actions and supporting post-conflict national reconciliation, including the reconstruction of infrastructure and the fabric of society. Outstanding among these were “The Brahimi Report” and “The Responsibility to Protect,” published in 2000 and 2001, respectively.
4. *From 2005 until today.* At the time of the UN’s sixtieth anniversary, what was emphasized was the consolidation of the post-conflict situation in order to give rise to national reconciliation and a *sustainable* peace. That was how a poorly financed Commission for the Consolidation of Peace was created, which at least warns of the importance of a territory overcoming the conditions that gave rise to armed conflict in the first place in those cases where a peacekeeping mission was needed. This is so it would not be necessary to deploy Blue Berets to the same place, or worse, prolong their presence indefinitely. It should also be underlined that in this period, there has been a much greater participation of troops from developing countries than before, although the quality of the contingents sent, with a few exceptions, was not the best. In addition, UN peacekeeping mission deployments have been carried

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out jointly with regional bodies such as the African Union, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union (EU), and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

#### PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS’ AIMS AND TASKS

From the political point of view, with the 1995 publication of the supplement to *A Peace Program* by then-UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, in order to make it possible for the UN to carry out actions aimed at maintaining international peace and security, five kinds of actions can be taken to aid with peacekeeping operations:

1. Preventive diplomacy
2. Achieving peace
3. Keeping the peace
4. Imposing peace
5. Consolidating peace.

All of these, with the exception of imposing peace, are part of the traditional sphere in which they operate. However, a mission that “imposes” peace changes conditions drastically, to the point that the soldiers sent could be deployed heavily armed without the consent of the parties in conflict so that, if necessary, they could join in combat.

Also, the possibility that Blue Berets carry out new tasks increases to the extent that the international agenda tends to be defined based on a *broad* concept of security, which includes both traditional and non-traditional threats. While the basic aim of peacekeeping operations has been to mitigate violent conflicts and their consequences, their sphere of action has also been broadened to include tasks such as DDR, organizing elections, reconstruction of basic infrastructure, the creation or re-adaptation of national institutions, etc. In many of these tasks, Mexico has experience and can provide assistance, even with non-military personnel.

#### FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Peacekeeping operations emerge first of all from a growing moral and political demand from civil society organizations, multilateral bodies, and governments to protect victims from the violation of their fundamental human rights and/or to

stabilize situations that imply grave risks for certain populations, circumstances that impact the security of the nation in question, its region, and the world. Thus, each operation is a particular case and constitutes a political action. Therefore, it is carried out in a dynamic political context and is constructed on the ground, on the move, progressively. While the operation's mandate and length are relatively easy to establish, the same cannot be said of the processes to build the peace. For this reason, the culmination date of a mission can be put off as time passes.

Mexico has participated sporadically with troops in peacekeeping operations, basically in the first years of the United Nations. Later, it became involved in different operations but only with civilian personnel. It should be underlined that the possibility has now opened up for the country to participate with military personnel in these operations to carry out tasks included in the classic meaning of the term that Marrack Goulding talked about. Nevertheless, given that during a violent conflict, the mandate of a peacekeeping operation can evolve into tasks of imposing the peace, Mexico must be cautious, since this kind of operation would contravene the principle of non-intervention enshrined in our Constitution. This is why it is very important that the country clearly define its position about the type of peacekeeping operation in which it would be par-

It is important for the country to clearly define its position about the type of peacekeeping it would participate in, stipulating the inadmissibility of being involved in imposing peace.

ticipating, stipulating the inadmissibility of its being involved in any operation aimed at imposing peace.

It is also important to underline that 16 peacekeeping operations are currently underway worldwide, most in Africa, a continent very little known to Mexico's foreign policy. Regardless of the country to which Mexico would send troops, it is very possible that it will receive a request to go in aid of an African nation. For that reason, our national authorities must have better knowledge of the world in general and the situation of the countries that it would support, for example, those in Africa.

Diverse technical, logistical, financial, and personnel-training considerations also exist that Mexico will have to deal with in order to send military and civilian personnel on peacekeeping operations. They must all be carefully examined to guarantee that the participation jibes with the national interest and genuinely contributes to maintaining international peace and security. ■■■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Margaret P. Karns and Karen A. Mingst, "Maintaining International Peace and Security: UN Peacekeeping and Peacemaking," Michael T. Clare and Daniel C. Thomas, eds., *World Security: Challenges for a New Century* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Berel Rodal, *The Somalia Experience in Strategic Perspective. Implications for the Military in a Free and Democratic Society* (Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada/Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> United Nations, "La responsabilidad de proteger" (New York: Oficina del Asesor Especial para la Prevención del Genocidio, n/d), <http://www.un.org/es/preventgenocide/adviser/responsibility.shtml>.

<sup>4</sup> Marrack Goulding, "The Evolution of United Nations Peacekeeping," *International Affairs* vol. 69, no. 3 (July 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Whether it was the United States in Somalia, France in Rwanda, and/or

Russia in Moldova, Tajikistan, and Georgia, countries in the "Russian sphere of influence." See Walter Clarke and Jeffrey Herbst, *Learning from Somalia: The Lessons of Armed Humanitarian Intervention* (Washington D. C.: Westview Press, 1997); Jonathan Stevenson, *Losing Modadishu: Testing U. S. Policy in Somalia* (Washington D. C.: Naval Institute Press, 1995); François-Xavier Verschave, *Complicité de génocide? La France au Rwanda* (Paris: La Découverte, 1994); Jean-Paul Gouteux, *Un génocide secret d'État: La France et le Rwanda, 1990-1997* (Paris: Éditions Sociales, 1998); Vénuste Kajimae, *France-Rwanda, les coulisses du génocide: Témoignage d'un rescapé (L'esprit frappeur avec Dagorno)* (Paris: Éditions Dagorno, 2002); Patrick de Saint-Exupéry, *L'inavouable. La France au Rwanda* (Paris: Éditions des Arènes, 2004); and John Mackinlay and Peter Cross, eds., *Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping* (Tokyo: The United Nations University Press, 2003).





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