

Agenda Item 86: Comprehensive Review of the whole question of peacekeeping operations in all their aspects

Statement by Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, PR on November 9, 2000

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset I would like to welcome Under Secretary General Jean Marie Guehenno and wish him a very successful and rewarding tenure as the head of one of the most important departments in the Secretariat. I would also like to thank him for a lucid presentation on the implementation of the Report of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations.

May I also take this opportunity to convey our appreciation to Ambassador Mbanefo and the Bureau of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations for the manner in which they guided the deliberations of the Committee during its session in February-March, 2000. The Report of the Committee makes a valuable contribution to the conduct of UN peacekeeping and provides the necessary guidelines for operations in the field. However, it is on the Brahimi Panel that everyone's attention is now drawn, and I will speak mostly on it.

We associate ourselves with the statement made by the distinguished Permanent Representative of Jordan, who spoke on behalf of NAM.

India has been a country which has been consistently active in UN peacekeeping operations from the birth of the institution. There has been no period when, in one capacity or another, India has not been engaged in this key activity of the United Nations. The concerned departments of the government and the country's professional armed forces therefore have half a century's experience to lean upon. We see peacekeeping activity of the United Nations as an international obligation on those with the capability to participate in it and we have accepted the ultimate sacrifice which our officers and soldiers have made in discharging this obligation. This commitment from India to UN peacekeeping is undiminished and will continue. India therefore is a country which has, as it were, a vested interest in strengthening peacekeeping operations of the United Nations in every possible way. I wish to emphasise that it is in this spirit that our observations are made. The report of the Brahimi Panel is a far reaching and ambitious one and therefore deserves to be paid the compliment of constructive scrutiny. We congratulate Mr. Brahimi on guiding the exceptional effort behind the important report and we could not have found a person better equipped to do this.

While the report of the Brahimi Panel, the Secretary General's report on how it might be implemented, and his outline of the resources required, are all of immediate interest, a review of peacekeeping should look at them together with the enquiry reports on Rwanda and Srebrenica, and the two seminal documents of the former Secretary General, the Agenda for Peace of 1992, and its Supplement, issued in 1995. We must do so because the Panel's recommendations sometimes differ from those of the two Secretaries General, whose own positions, particularly those of Mr. Boutros-Ghali, evolved with hard experience, and member states need to balance these conflicting views before deciding on a course of action.

We have asked why the subject of the Panel's report was "peace operations", rather than "peacekeeping operations", and have been told that this is merely semantic, but in fact it is not. There is a long-standing difference of opinion between member states, and within the Secretariat, on the scope of peacekeeping, which started when the previous SG, asked by the Security Council in 1992 to prepare a report on preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping, added on, as he said in his Agenda for Peace, "a closely related concept, post-conflict peace-building".

In his Supplement to the Agenda for Peace, however, the Secretary General recognised that post-conflict peace-building could not be part of a peace-keeping operation. He wrote:

"Most of the activities that together constitute peace-building fall within the mandates of the various programmes, funds, offices and agencies of the United Nations system In a country ruined by war, resumption of such activities may initially have to be entrusted to, or at least coordinated by, a multifunctional peace-keeping operation, but as that operation succeeds in restoring normal conditions, the programmes, funds, offices and agencies can re-establish themselves and gradually take over responsibility from the peace-keepers.... It may also be necessary in such cases to arrange the transfer of decision-making responsibility from the Security Council, which will have authorized the mandate and deployment of the peace-keeping operation, to the General Assembly or other inter-governmental bodies with responsibility for the civilian peace-building activities that will continue."

We have always believed that a peacekeeping operation, no matter how complex, is, and must be, distinct from post-conflict peace-building, which is in the purview of the General Assembly. The previous SG, who first clubbed it with peacekeeping, learning from experience, veered round to this point of view, which has always been the position of the Non-aligned Movement. The peace operations that the Brahimi Panel recommends, and caters for, revert to the constructs of the Agenda for Peace, which were not accepted by the General Assembly, and from which, basing himself on experience, the previous SG had distanced himself.

Mr. Chairman, on peacekeeping, we are advised that it is in crisis, but the focus of attention is on strengthening the Secretariat "on an emergency basis". This implies that the crisis lies there, and adding staff is the cure. We believe this is a dangerous simplification of a complex problem. The systemic problems that beset peacekeeping lie elsewhere, and cannot be corrected by an emergency infusion of extra personnel; if it feeds this illusion, the Secretariat might find that, when crises recur, the entire blame will fall on it.

If we deconstruct peacekeeping, the first point that strikes us is the number of crises caused because peacekeeping operations were not mounted, or discontinued, because the Security Council so acted. We saw this inaction in Rwanda as the genocide began, to leave Somalia to its warlords, and in the inability for many months to seriously consider setting up an operation in the DRC. These decisions reflected a deficit in responding to the needs of countries in crisis. They were failures of political will; in each of these cases, the Council acted as it did by choice. This systemic problem, which is at the heart of the crisis in peacekeeping, can only be corrected once the Security Council has itself been reformed, and

made more representative of the general membership. At the moment, though the Third World dominates the Council's agenda, developing countries have little say in its decisions. Whether a peacekeeping operation will be set up, and in which form, depends overwhelmingly on the wishes of the permanent members, where the developing world is not represented. The Brahimi Panel could not address this first and most basic problem, which was outside its remit. Mr. Chairman, I say this only as a comment on the composition of the Council germane to peacekeeping decisions. As a theme this subject is being pursued elsewhere.

Will the General Assembly's acceptance of the Brahimi Panel's report mean that peacekeeping operations will now be set up when they are needed? It will not; this situation will continue.

Once a decision is taken to set up a peacekeeping operation, the Security Council gives it a mandate, tasks and resources: this will necessarily be determined less by need than by what the permanent members will accept. The Secretariat is inclined to offer advice which the Council wishes to have, not what is objective, or what is needed. This has sown the seeds for crises in more than one ongoing operation, but is a matter of expediency, not brought about because the Secretariat lacks either information or analytical capacity. The Panel urges the Secretariat to provide impartial and objective advice, but there is no indication that it will comply when this advice is not welcome.

Will the General Assembly's acceptance of the Brahimi Panel's report mean that the Secretariat analyses and advice on which peacekeeping operations are developed will now be objective? They will not; there is no reason to believe that the expanded DPKO, supported by an expanded DPA, will not continue to offer the same quality of advice. This situation will also continue.

A problem that bedevils many complex PKOs from the start is the concept of operations prepared by the Secretariat. Arbitrary changes to the concept triggered off an internal crisis in UNAMSIL. In MONUC, though still not off the ground, the concept was flawed from the outset, as it was in Somalia. Though not acknowledged, these concepts are often drawn up in military establishments elsewhere when the DPKO does not lack the capacity to prepare them. Strengthening the Secretariat's capacity will be meaningless if this practice continues.

Will the General Assembly's acceptance of the Brahimi Panel's report mean that concepts of operation will now be drawn up only in the Secretariat? This would be a doubtful conclusion since the considerations which have brought this practice about will not go away. This situation then may also continue.

As recent experience has shown, most glaringly in Sierra Leone, crises have been caused when contingents have arrived in theatre ill-trained, ill-equipped and poorly prepared and provisioned. This is a problem that the Secretariat has complained about for several years, including in Mr. Boutros-Ghali's two reports. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, this problem too is unlikely to go away, despite the recommendations made in the Panel's report. Firstly, the number of countries with professional armies, which are prepared to contribute to PKOs, is limited; very few developed countries want to put their troops at risk. Secondly, the Secretariat now believes that, at least in some PKOs, it is

politically important to take forces from countries in the region, which may not be the optimal approach. Thirdly, training troops is a continuing and costly enterprise; the UN does not have the money for this, and if indeed it is made available, developing countries would ask if it might not be put to better use in development. If these problems cannot be solved, and it is difficult to see how they can, crises will recur, the Panel's report notwithstanding.

Will the General Assembly's acceptance of the Brahimi Panel's report mean that henceforth only well-trained, well-equipped and disciplined troops will go into peacekeeping operations? It will not; this situation too will endure.

The crucial and awkward choice that has forced peacekeeping operations into crisis, from Somalia to Bosnia-Herzegovina to Rwanda to Sierra Leone, is how to tackle violent opposition to the presence of the UN or to the agreement which the PKO is supposed to help implement. The Brahimi Panel starts off making the point that "when the United Nations does send its forces to uphold the peace, they must be prepared to confront the lingering forces of war and violence, with the ability and determination to defeat them".

This basic premise, from which the Brahimi Panel's recommendations flow, directly contradicts the experience of the UN as an institution, of troop contributors, and the personal recommendations of both the present Secretary General and his predecessor. In the Supplement to an Agenda for Peace, written in the aftermath of crises in several complex peacekeeping operations, Mr. Boutros-Ghali said that:

"The United Nations can be proud of the speed with which peace-keeping has evolved in response to the new political environment resulting from the end of the cold war, but the last few years have confirmed that respect for certain basic principles of peace-keeping are essential to its success. Three particularly important principles are the consent of the parties, impartiality and the non-use of force except in self-defence. Analysis of recent successes and failures shows that in all the successes those principles were respected and in most of the less successful operations one or other of them was not."

And he went on to write:

"Peacekeeping and the use of force (other than in self-defence) should be seen as alternative techniques and not as adjacent points on a continuum, permitting easy transition from one to the other".

We might think that these views are now five years old, and neither the Secretariat nor the present Secretary General are bound by them, but in the Srebrenica report, which was one of the triggers for the Brahimi Panel, the Secretary General, sifting lessons for the future, wrote:

"The first of the general lessons is that when peacekeeping operations are used as a substitute for ... political consensus they are likely to fail... peacekeeping and war fighting are distinct activities which should not be mixed. Peacekeepers must never again be deployed into an environment in

which there is no ceasefire or peace agreement. Peacekeepers must never again be told that they must use their peacekeeping tools... to impose the ill-defined wishes of the international community on one or another of the belligerents by military means”.

Although paragraph 6 (e) the Implementation Report disclaims that the Panel's report is to be seen as recommending a fundamental change in the principles according to which peacekeepers use force, the fact is that it does. The fundamental change in conception and direction for peacekeeping operations this would entail implies our going back to the policies followed briefly, and unsuccessfully, before the events in Somalia proved them misconceived. The views of the two Secretary Generals, and of most of the major troop contributors, based on hard experience, contradict this recommendation. Accepting it may lead us into crises rather than end them.

Even if the UN continues to distinguish between peacekeeping, no matter how complex, and the use of force implicit in the Panel's recommendations, there will be crises when PKOs go into areas that are still unsettled. As Rwanda showed, forces on the ground pick up, faster and better than information-gathering units based in New York, early warnings of impending crises, and are in the best position to advise what can or should be done militarily to preempt or tackle them. In the preparation of a PKO's tasks and in the evolution of its mandate, the Security Council and the Secretariat must consult closely with the Troop Contributing Countries, taking their advice into account. The continuing crisis in UNAMSIL illustrates why this is essential. Troop contributors will be increasingly reluctant to put their forces at risk, when they are asked to discharge unrealistic tasks, and when their advice, based on experience gathered on the ground, is not sought, or not accepted when offered.

Mr. Chairman, there is a further, systemic problem, not addressed by the Panel. It encourages the use of force, which the Council can only mandate under Chapter VII. Articles 43 and 44 of the Charter, in Chapter VII, lay down that the Security Council shall invite members providing armed forces “to participate in the decisions of the Security Council concerning the employment of contingents of that Member's armed forces.” The Charter requires much more than consultations; TCCs must be able to “participate” in the Council's decisions. The Panel recommends only that TCCs be more closely consulted, but, even on this, there is no evidence that the Security Council seriously wishes to go beyond its present procedures, which are completely inadequate. If the Charter provisions are not followed, if TCCs are not given a say in the evolution of the Council's mandates, there will be recurring crises when, in exasperation, troop contributors pull out of operations where their units are forced to take on tasks that either cannot or should not be done.

All PKOs have the problem of coordination between units that come from different political and military backgrounds, and which often do not share a common language. This problem can only be kept within manageable limits if all units are disciplined, and determined to work together. Two developments have made this problem worse over the last few years. The first is the emergence within the DPKO of a combat approach heavily influenced by unfamiliar military doctrines with which most TCCs, as developing countries, are unfamiliar: they find the imported mindset and preconceptions of the DPKO hard to accept, nor indeed do these lend themselves to peacekeeping, rather than war fighting. The second is the decline in the quality of the forces often made available to the UN. There are

no ready solutions forthcoming for either problem, though it is essential to correct the perspective of the DPKO by recruiting much more than it does now from the military establishments of developing countries, and particularly of troop contributors.

These are the real problems that beset peacekeeping. Almost all of them are problems that must be addressed, at least in the first instance, by member states. A larger Secretariat will have no impact either on the problems, or on their resolution. The Panel justifies its recommendation for a larger DPKO with the argument that no national army would ever contemplate headquarters support as sketchy as it claims DPKO's presently is. The Report argues that "no national Government would send 27,000 troops into the field with just 32 officers back home to provide them with substantive and operational military guidance". The figure of 32 very considerably understates the number of staff actually available, in DPKO, DPA and FALD, to support PKOs; in fact, the actual ratio compares rather favourably with that of the Indian Army. But also this argument assumes, incorrectly, that a PKO is a full military operation, and needs the headquarters support of national forces going into battle.

The argument could in fact be turned around. No national Government would contemplate sending five battalions into an unsettled region the size of Western Europe, which is what the Council has mandated for the first phase of the operation in the DRC. No national Government would have expected a brigade of infantry to hold the upper half of Somalia, which the Indian unit in UNOSOM had to do. No national Government would have deployed troops in penny packets into potentially hostile territory as the UN did in Sierra Leone. By definition, PKOs are not military operations, and the support they need from headquarters cannot be compared to the needs of an army going into action against an enemy force. The Panel's argument, apparently so persuasive, is in fact specious.

In 1994-5, when multi-disciplinary peacekeeping was at its peak, DPKO had 578 staff (including gratis personnel) to service the needs of around 73,000 troops, a ratio of 0.79 % between headquarters and the field. Today, with around 37,000 personnel in PKOs, DPKO has 349 posts in the Support Account and 55 in the Regular Budget; the ratio is 1.09 %. The emergency request for 249 additional posts would raise the ratio to 1.63 %, nearly double the figure for 1994, when demands on the DPKO were at their height, and we had not heard that the staffing level was inadequate.

We should also remember that DPKO is only part of the picture; the Panel's report and the Secretary General's request for emergency resources also covers the DPA, which was set up as a separate unit with 156 posts in 1992, in response to a mandate from a Security Council summit, precisely to "collect and analyse pertinent information in order to alert the relevant intergovernmental organs about impending crises". In 1995, in his Supplement to an Agenda for Peace, reporting that the Department was now organised to follow political developments worldwide, so that it could provide early warning of impending conflicts and analyse possibilities for preventive action by the United Nations, as well as for action to help resolve existing conflicts, the SG said:

"Experience has shown that the greatest obstacle to success in these endeavours is not, as is widely supposed, lack of information, analytical capacity or ideas for United Nations initiatives."

In 1997, the present SG reorganised the DPA again, removing from it both General Assembly Affairs and Disarmament, so that it could focus on its core functions. Even though it shed these other functions, and over 50 staff with it, by the time the present biennial budget came around, its staff strength had risen to 195. Before we decide on strengthening the DPA and its structures even further, we surely need to know why, given a narrow set of tasks to discharge, and greatly expanded resources to do them with, it has implicitly fallen short in these tasks.

It is not that we do not favour strengthening of Headquarters' support of peacekeeping. How could it be otherwise, when throughout the life of this organisation, we have been near or at the top of the list of troop contributors, and have served in almost every major peacekeeping operation? What we are reluctant to favour is waste of this Organisation's resources, a reinvention of peacekeeping in forms that have been tried and failed, and the setting up of structures that are not needed. The Special Committee has been repeatedly calling for a comprehensive review of DPKO's structure for the last few years. This has gone unheeded. We are now given a proposal for an emergency supplementary increase from the Support Account "based on a quick macro review". Without a comprehensive review it would be difficult to justify the request for 249 additional posts to backstop "peace operations". However, the Military Division, particularly the Military Planning Service, the Civilian Police Division and the Office of Operations in DPKO, could do with some strengthening, but they should be largely manned by personnel from major troop contributing countries. We would be pleased to support proposals that would do this.

Mr. Chairman,

The above are some thoughts of a broad nature, which we find appropriate to make in this Committee towards a constructive debate. There are other points on which we would be giving our views as the consideration of the Special Committee's report progresses. As stated earlier, we shall be doing this in a spirit of constructive engagement, as we have always endeavoured to do.