

## *No Exit without Strategies*

*Statement by Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, PR on November 15, 2000*

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Mr. President,

With true Dutch courage, you have chosen a theme for this open debate that goes to the heart of the problems that bedevil peacekeeping. Your courage demands frankness from us. I will speak frankly, but I would speak far too long if I went into every issue that should be addressed. I will focus therefore only on some key concerns.

### *Is there a new peacekeeping?*

You have said that there should be no exit from a peacekeeping operation without a strategy, but there is renewed confusion over what peacekeeping is. Though five years ago, the euphoria of an Agenda for Peace was corrected, in the cold light of experience, in its Supplement, the Council is being invited back into the same misty evangelism which caused havoc in several peacekeeping operations. Influential voices argue again that modern peacekeeping forces must be prepared to defeat the lingering forces of violence. This sounds plausible, but is in fact not doable, for a number of reasons. The Council will set up peacekeeping operations for an inevitable fall if it goes this route, on which there is no exit without embarrassment.

As an example, the Council has just set up a “classic” peacekeeping operation, to monitor a cease-fire between two countries. All of us trust and hope that the cease-fire will hold, but if it unravels, the Council will surely not expect that PKO to use force against either party, to coerce it back to the status quo. Instead, as it did each time war has broken out in the Middle East in an area where a PKO was deployed, the Council would authorize its immediate evacuation. This would not mean that the credibility of the operation, or of the Security Council, or of the UN, was called into question. It would simply be to accept that peacekeeping could do no more.

However, in Sierra Leone, the Council sets mandates that involve UNAMSIL’s going into action against the RUF, to force it back to the Lome Agreement. In both operations, the UN is interposed between parties to a conflict. For a peacekeeping operation, there is in a sense no difference between an inter- and an intra-state conflict. Impartiality and consent are as essential in one situation as it is in the other. We urge the Council to bear this in mind when it formulates, and even more when it alters, peacekeeping mandates. As any experienced troop contributor knows, in peacekeeping it is best not to veer from classicism to romanticism.

### *Regionalism and its discontents*

Throughout the first forty years of peacekeeping, the UN followed an unwritten rule in peacekeeping, spelt out by the Secretary General to the General Assembly when UNEF, the first PKO, was set up. As the chapter on UNEF in “The Blue Helmets” recalls,

“Troops from the permanent members of the Security Council or from any country which, for geographical and other reasons, might have a special interest in the conflict would be excluded”.

The permanent members did not participate, because it was normally at the end of their proxy wars that the UN sent in its peacekeepers. Neighbours and regional powers were excluded, because by definition they could not be disinterested. The UN understood, quite rightly, that successful peacekeeping can only be carried out by countries that were neutral, and had no interests of their own to pursue.

This cardinal rule has repeatedly been broken in recent years, with the UN now co-opting regional players, though it is in the nature of politics that they are often part of the problem, not of the solution. This has had repercussions on more than one peacekeeping operation, but it seems that lessons have not been learnt.

Of the three case studies listed in your paper, the UN's experience in Liberia has been studied in depth in the book published last year by the UN University, "Peacekeepers, Politicians and Warlords" - that made the telling point that intra-state conflicts almost invariably spilled over boundaries: displaced populations crossed borders, refugees became pawns in a larger game, warlords used contiguous foreign territories as safe havens, and as a result, in these, even more than in the earlier inter-state wars, neighbouring states and regional powers became a part of the conflict.

It is in Africa that the Council has lent most towards regional solutions. The UNIDIR study, published earlier this year, tellingly named "Peacekeeping in Africa: Capabilities and Culpabilities", makes the point that many Africans believe this is so because the major powers do not want to get involved in Africa. Regionalism is a self-serving way out, but it makes peacekeeping enormously difficult for the UN, and for countries like India, that have participated in almost every operation in Africa.

Africans see the problem clearly. In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, for instance, whose neighbours have been drawn into the conflict, the mini-summit of the parties to the conflict in Tripoli on November 7-8, agreed as the first point in their communique, that a "*neutral African force shall be deployed immediately in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*". By definition, none of the regional countries now embroiled in the conflict can be brought into a UN peacekeeping operation either, and the UN has not, for once, made the mistake of inviting them to re-hat their forces in MONUC.

It is truly a pity that this eminently sensible practice has been so unwisely ignored elsewhere in Africa. Regional interests will force out the disinterested; peacekeeping in these circumstances becomes a flawed instrument.

### ***DDR - no exit on the fourth floor***

Almost every peacekeeping operation is now predicated on DDR, but, unlike the DDR with which we are familiar here, what it produces is often of dubious quality. Based on the Liberian experience, the UNU study asks if disarmament should be a priority, when demobilisation of traumatised fighters into a scarred society creates its own problems, and re-integration is impossible without economic opportunities. It argues that the insistence on disarmament was not helpful in Liberia, and was ineffective. Without either security or employment, young men did not give up the weapons on which their lives and livelihoods depended. In Sierra Leone, disarmament was what triggered off the RUF's return to violence.

The key, possibly, is for the Council to dispatch, at the very outset, a peacekeeping force so large and well-armed that it would not only provide a sense of security to all but be clearly so strong that no faction could take it on. Only a force like that, on the lines of those sent by NATO into the Balkans before the UN took over, would persuade faction leaders to disarm. However, so far the Council has not been generous at the outset, only authorising deployment in the numbers and the quality needed after a crisis has set in. This has truly been a false economy; the cost has been paid by the UN, by peacekeepers, and most of all by the civilian victims of resumed conflict.

### *The role of humanitarian relief*

The farewell address to the Security Council, a few days ago, of the High Commissioner for Refugees, highlighted the contradictions between the needs of peacekeeping and those of humanitarian relief.

Agencies that provide relief arrive in a theatre of conflict well before the peacekeepers do. Throughout the conflict, they have to come to a *modus vivendi* with the parties. Their operations may be skeletal, like their beneficiaries, but they do serve a vital function. Once peace is restored, they want to expand their operations. Why, they ask reasonably, should the local population have a stake in peace if it brings them no immediate benefits, and they expect peacekeeping forces, once they arrive, to ensure that relief operations on a much larger scale can be carried on unimpeded.

Unfortunately, this is where problems begin. The warlords believe that if they lose control of who gets what in their areas of influence, their power will fade away; they resist a spurt in relief activity that excludes them. If the peacekeeping forces are conduits for the delivery of aid, warlords see them as adversaries. If the peacekeeping forces decline help, relief agencies complain bitterly that they are of no use, and pressures mount in the Council to issue mandates that explicitly ask for the force to facilitate the provision of humanitarian assistance. In either case, the PKO is drawn into a mire.

The Council's humanitarian impulse is natural, but conducting humanitarian relief through peacekeeping undermines both. Indian peacekeeping units invariably provide humanitarian relief, judging local conditions in the light of experience. This gives them an entree into local society, makes the peacekeeping operation visible and acceptable, and slowly weans the population away from the warlords. However, a rush to bring in relief, including through military convoys, usually leads to more problems. The crises that erupt ensure that the aid providers leave, and the peacekeepers get bogged down, with no exit in sight.

### *Foday in the sky with diamonds*

Citing the diamond embargoes in Angola and Sierra Leone, your paper, Mr. President, asks the Council to use all forms of leverage at its disposal to "assist the peace operation implement its mandate". It is a moot point if these decisions are within the Council's mandate; it is also by no means settled that indeed they assist a PKO; what is clear is that, as in Sierra Leone, the diamond embargo required UNAMSIL to take on unforeseen, very ambitious and dangerous tasks, which peacekeepers are not best suited for. As the Council would have seen from the Note Verbale of the 16th October sent to it by the Permanent Mission of Angola, conflict diamonds were shut down there only after the Government of Angola wrested

control of the diamond mining areas from UNITA. In Sierra Leone, it remains to be seen whether the RUF will actually surrender control of the diamond fields; if it does not, and UNAMSIL is asked to take them back by force, the PKO would be pursuing a radically altered objective.

In Afghanistan, the war is believed to be fuelled by the sale of illicit drugs. So too are some conflicts in Central America. It is an odd paradox that, because this is a product that is wholly illicit, the Council has made no effort whatsoever to proscribe these as "conflict drugs". There is conflict timber in West Africa as well, conflict cobalt in Central Africa. What will drive Council action? It cannot stop all illicit economic activity believed to drive conflict; the temptation is to fall back on tokenism. The end result will not be to assist a peacekeeping operation, but to lay upon it tasks that it cannot discharge.

### *Lasting peace*

Your non-paper, Mr. President, asks the Council to so structure peacekeeping operations that they leave a lasting peace behind. This is a tall order. Mrs. Ogata explained the problem very well; there is a gap, she reminded the Council, between emergency relief and long-term development and reconstruction programmes, and during that gap, societies could unravel again, and conflicts resume. Is the answer then to maintain peacekeeping operations until reconstruction is well on its way? That too is unsustainable, for reasons also explained by Mrs. Ogata.

Development agencies are slow to come once a crisis has ended and the country is no longer fashionable. In fact, experience has shown that, in this respect, a peacekeeping operation becomes the victim of its own success. As the peace takes hold, media attention dwindles, and with it donor interest fades. This was the case in Haiti, for instance, one of the case studies in your paper. Before peace takes hold, all donors argue, reasonably, that they want to see a semblance of security before they invest, but without investment there are no jobs, therefore no demobilization or re-integration and therefore no real security, and in turn no lasting peace. However, when the peacekeeping operation creates the conditions for peace to return, the absence of crisis leads to an absence of donor interest. This vicious cycle has to be broken, but peacekeeping cannot do it. Post-conflict peace building cannot be done through peacekeeping, is not in the Council's mandate, and it is much too ambitious an undertaking for a PKO.

### *Are peacekeepers press-ganged?*

Somalia best illustrates the role the media plays in Council decisions. Gruesome television coverage first got the UN into Somalia, and then forced it out. Emotions are stirred by television, but emotion does not make for sound policy, particularly when, as a result, pressure mounts for quick action. Very few members of the Security Council are major troop contributors, and there is a tendency to throw the PKO at any tragedy that presents itself on screen. This is what leads to the phenomenon of "mission creep", changes in the mandate and tasks of a PKO, responding to media and political pressure, that ask it to do what either cannot or should not be done.

On this matter, the permanent and non-permanent members share equal responsibility. Very often, the non-permanent members, most of whom do not have the independent, intelligence-gathering ability of some of the permanent members, are even more dependent on and swayed by overwrought media reports, forcing the Council to act in haste, with unfortunate consequences for peacekeeping operations. In Bosnia, responding to media coverage, the non-permanent members insisted on the designation of safe havens which, as Srebrenica proved, were neither safe nor havens; some realised, too late, that they

had been wrong. In Sierra Leone, earlier this year, the non-permanent members asked for a change to a Chapter VII mandate as soon as the crisis erupted, even though the troop contributors knew this would have unfortunate consequences.

### ***Suffer the troop contributors***

The Council needs to consult far more widely than it does now before it changes a mandate; key players, who know the situation on the ground better than most, are in daily touch with developments, and can advise on the basis of practical experience on what needs to be done, are the troop contributors, but they are rarely consulted by the Council, or if they are, their advice is rarely taken seriously. In any sensible operation run by a national government, policy would be changed only in the light of reports from the ground. I urge the Council to keep up a meaningful dialogue with troop contributors. They are the ones doing the job, and professional forces want to make sure that they do it right, and leave once they have done it. Their advice will be sound, objective and unbiased; it will serve the Council well.

### ***Exit, pursued by a host***

In closing, may I say that it is also essential that a peacekeeping operation should not be dragged out when it no longer has a useful role to play; it should leave before the host makes it clear that it has overstayed its welcome. That would be an exit without dignity. The vast majority of the operations set up over the last fifty years have been wound up, with the countries concerned by and large none the worse for it. Peacekeeping should not become a crutch, or a means of establishing that a conflict continues; it runs the risk then of becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The case histories in your paper could be usefully rounded out by the Council's considering the lessons that should be drawn from the winding up of UNAMIR in Rwanda and MONUA in Angola. In both instances, the Governments concerned decided at a certain point of time that the peacekeeping operations served no purpose; they welcomed a UN presence in their countries, but no longer headed by a peacekeeping operation. Neither the Secretariat nor the Council wanted this. Again, if the Council is honest with itself, it will concede that pique had some play here; since the Council decides when a PKO will be set up and when it will be wound up, it does not like to have a beneficiary decide what is best for it. *Pari passu*, this is also the attitude of the Secretariat. Thankfully, in both Angola and Rwanda, good sense prevailed, and the peacekeeping operations were withdrawn when the Governments concerned made it clear that they no longer wanted them there. This too is a lesson that the Council must learn - exit with humility.

### ***The end of peacekeeping***

If a peacekeeping operation is to be brought to a successful end, without any apocalyptic codas, we believe the following principles will serve the Council well:

- before setting up an operation, it should satisfy itself that the terms and the time-frame of the peace agreements the UN is supposed to monitor and help implement are reasonable;

- consult widely in the region, and within the country, to ensure that the agreement is truly supported by all key players;
- explain to all parties just what the role of the peacekeeping operation will be, and get their concurrence;
- choose as troop contributors those without a vested interest in the country concerned, and which have armed forces that are professional, apolitical, disciplined and well- equipped; sending inadequate forces is as self-defeating as sending armed forces accustomed to usurping power at home to promote democratic settlements abroad;
- consult closely with the troop contributors at every stage of the operation, and base decisions on their advice;
- deploy in sufficient force, so that the operation can immediately and visibly, through its presence, provide security where there has been none;
- only once a general sense of security has been established, and all factions are confident that if they disarm, they will not become vulnerable, move to DDR at a pace with which all parties are comfortable;
- through its calming presence, create the environment in which the delivery of humanitarian assistance can be steadily improved, without either forcing the pace, or becoming directly involved, in the face of possible opposition, in the delivery of assistance;
- once disarmament is almost complete, and confidence in the impartiality of the PKO has been established, it can, if needed, move towards actions that are described as “aid to civil authority”;
- either when an inclusive political arrangement is in place, or when a Government firmly in power, with whose consent the PKO had been established, asks it to leave, the operation should be wound up, though the UN’s other tasks would continue;
- post-conflict peace-building would continue over many years, but the peacekeeping operation would be its precursor; it should normally be long gone by the time this process gets into full swing.

We wish all success to the Council in its tasks.

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