The Other Side of Peacekeeping:
Peace Enforcement and Who Should Do It?

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I therefore do not interpret any portion of the Panel's report [Brahimi Report] as a recommendation to turn the United Nations into a war-fighting machine or to fundamentally change the principles according to which peacekeepers use force.¹

Kofi Annan, UN Secretary General

On 6 October 1998 senior United Nations officials gathered in the grand General Assembly Hall for a Special Commemorative meeting of the General Assembly honoring 50 years of peacekeeping. Following a ceremonial presentation of the first Dag Hammarskjöld Medals to the families of the three distinguished UN peacekeepers who lost their lives in the pursuit of world peace, a session was conducted to assess the lessons of UN peacekeeping. Over 200 former and currently serving Special Representatives of the Secretary General, Force Commanders, and distinguished peacekeepers assembled to share their views. The real focus of the discussions was, however, on the lessons learned about peacekeeping from 1991 to 1998. These were the years that really define how UN peacekeeping is done today. One of the many revelations of the day was a general agreement that the United Nations cannot do

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peace enforcement operations.\textsuperscript{2} This raises the question, if the UN does not do international peace enforcement, then who does it?

Why did this session come to this conclusion? It was simple: they learned it the hard way, with the blood of far too many soldiers and civilians. The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, said it best when he addressed the General Assembly on 6 October:

Over the decades, we have had some unmistakable successes, such as Namibia, Mozambique, and El Salvador. But we have found ourselves maintaining calm in some seemingly intractable stalemates such as Cyprus and the Middle East. And in some places – Rwanda and former Yugoslavia – we have found ourselves standing by, in impotent horror, while the most appalling crimes were committed. There the limits of peacekeeping were graphically demonstrated: we learned, the hard way, that lightly armed troops in white vehicles and blue helmets are not the solution to every conflict. Sometimes peace has to made – or enforced – before it can be kept.\textsuperscript{3}

There is no doubt that the UN is now performing what its founders outlined in the UN Charter. With 17 peacekeeping missions and 43,000 troops deployed from 88 nations in October 2002, the UN is answering the call to challenges of breaches of international security, but so are other organizations and nations. These include NATO's 70,000 peacekeepers in the Balkans (20,000 in Bosnia-Herzegovina and 50,000 in Kosovo) and two coalitions of the willing, the Multinational Observer Force in the Sinai with almost 2000 peacekeepers and the International Security and Assistance Force led by Turkey in Afghanistan with another 5000. This raises the question: why are other organizations conducting peacekeeping? The simple answer to this question is that consensus for the UN to conduct these missions could not be reached in the Security Council but, in reality, two of these missions (Kosovo and Afghanistan) are not peacekeeping but peace enforcement missions. They are high-risk operations very similar to the UN missions in the Former Yugoslavia and Rwanda the Secretary General described.

Although UN peacekeeping goes back 52 years, the lessons of today really began at the end of the Cold War. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, UN peacekeeping began to take on the challenges that were envisioned by the drafters of the UN Charter – "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war." As the Secretary General pointed out, there are many examples demonstrating that the nations of the world are getting better at handling complex peace operations. On the other hand, there are significant challenges associated with the UN executing peace enforcement

\textsuperscript{2} Author was then the Military Advisor to the United States Permanent Representative to the United Nations, and participated in this discussion on 6 October 1998.

\textsuperscript{3} K. Annan, Statement before the Special Commemorative Meeting of the General Assembly Honoring 50 Years of Peacekeeping, 6 October 2000, from UN website, accessed on 26 November 2002.