Simulating Crises: A Peacekeeping Teaching Technique

Elizabeth Griffin and Anthony Verrier*

Abstract

Teaching the practical aspects of peacekeeping is an activity that is mainly restricted to military staff colleges. However, for a number of years, students studying for the LL.M in International Human Rights Law and the MA in The Theory and Practice of Human Rights at the University of Essex (United Kingdom) have had the opportunity to participate in a unique exercise which is designed to examine the practical dilemmas faced by military and civilian personnel deployed as a part of peace support operations. This exercise, know as the SIMULEX, is staged at Colchester Garrison, headquarters of the 16 Air Assault Brigade. The SIMULEX provides participants with an opportunity to act out a number of scenarios which civilian and military personnel are likely to face when working within the context of peace support operations. Students and participating military personnel are assigned various "roles" and they engage in a number of joint problem solving exercises which are conceived with the aim of providing students with a real taste of the tough dilemmas faced by civilian and military personnel working on the ground and with the intention of fostering mutual understanding of the military and civilian perspectives. The origins, evolution and value of the SIMULEX as a teaching technique are described in this article.

* Elizabeth Griffin, Lecturer in International Human Rights, Law Department of Essex University. Dr. Anthony Verrier, former Director, MA in International Peacekeeping, Essex University.

1. Introduction

It is doubtful whether any academic or vocational course in peacekeeping can ever hope to fully prepare individuals for the complex and dangerous assignments that they face when they are deployed in, or alongside, peace support operations. Moreover, even personnel who have received training in preparation for deployment within the context of complex emergencies, acute crises or post-conflict situations have little time to reflect on the academic and theoretical debates which underpin international peacekeeping. Rather, their time is taken up with formulating responses to a range of tough dilemmas and problems that require immediate and decisive action. Nevertheless, the need for training and preparation for the 'real world' remains a key component of Essex University's peacekeeping curriculum, which is geared towards providing students not only with a sound theoretical and legal knowledge of peacekeeping operations, but also a taste of the real scenarios they are likely to encounter on the field. Alongside academic teaching of 'the international law of peacekeeping', students at Essex University are offered the opportunity of participating in a simulated peacekeeping exercise – the SIMULEX. The aim of the SIMULEX is to foster convergence of military and civilian perspectives and to prepare students for the field. The methodology, achievements and benefits of this innovative teaching technique are the subject of this article.

2. Fostering Convergence of Civilian and Military Cultures

"We need you as much as you need us". With these words, in the autumn of 1995, Brigadier Robin Brims defined the basic objective of the SIMULEX which the University of Essex and Colchester Garrison were preparing to initiate. The objective of the SIMULEX was – and still is – to bring students and soldiers together, to jointly "role play", or simulate, an actual or probable crisis involving United Nations mandated or franchised out police and military forces and the plethora of international and non-governmental civilian agencies who are engaged in the broadest range of civilian professional tasks, including humanitarian relief and human rights field work.

The sub-text to General Brims' statement should be clearly understood. Civilians and soldiers operate in different spheres and are ingrained with different cultural values. Experience from the field tells us that these two cultures do not easily harmonise. While many of the objectives to be pursued in peace support operations, such as establishing and maintaining security, relieving human suffering and protecting and promoting adherence to international human rights standards may be readily defined, the philosophical underpinnings and methodologies applied by civilian and military personnel in the field to achieve these ends often diverge, and fre-