

Mondial

UN Emergency Peace Service: Governments not ready, are we?

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Historically, it is readily evident that nation states postpone devoting serious consideration to collective security and proposals for a modestly empowered United Nations until the aftermath of bad wars or genocides. Tragic conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan and Darfur have attracted wider critical reflection. Global polls suggest they may be partially responsible for prompting a shift in attitudes and priorities. Yet, regrettably, the UN and member states are entering a uniquely turbulent era with insufficient preparation and inappropriate 'tools' to deal with contemporary problems.

Nevertheless, it is precisely the prospect of continued instability and conflict ahead that makes a UN Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS) more important and more likely to emerge as a policy option within the next two-to-five years. Large shocks are nearly inevitable, as are larger shifts in attitudes and priorities.

Many national and UN officials have repeatedly stressed the urgent need for a rapid deployment capability, a strategic reserve, a force multiplier, a deterrent capacity and one that might protect civilians and provide humanitarian assistance. Unfortunately, these needs have not been adequately addressed. With 16 diverse peacekeeping operations worldwide, both the UN and contributing member states are overstretched. People remain at risk largely because governments tend to debate and delay any peacekeeping deployment for four to six months, if not longer. With slow responses, there is little to stop violent conflicts from escalating and spreading, necessitating later, larger, more expensive efforts. The late and lame 'hybrid' response to Darfur confirms how far we've actually come since the Rwandan genocide.

To prevent genocide, protect civilians and deploy rapidly to stop deadly conflict, the UN needs a capacity to send a legitimate (i.e., universal), credible (i.e., robust), integrated (i.e., multidimensional and multifunctional) presence, which is widely acceptable (i.e., authorized). A UNEPS would complement existing UN standby arrangements by providing a critical 'first responder' or 'lead service'.

UNEPS was primarily design-ed for the following four tasks:

- preventing armed conflict, including genocide and gross violations of human rights;
- protecting civilians at risk;
- ensuring prompt start-up of demanding peace operations;
- addressing human needs in areas where others cannot.

UNEPS could provide well-coordinated responses to help with disaster relief and environmental, health and humanitarian emergencies. Aside from providing a robust

military presence to maintain security, there would be sufficient police to restore law and order, as well as an array of civilian teams.

UNEPS would be an integrated service composed of approximately 15,000 personnel, assigned to a designated UN base under two mobile mission headquarters.

With a start-up cost of about \$2 billion and annual recurring costs of nearly \$1 billion, it might be viewed as a major investment, although it would likely be shared between UN member states. However, the cost of such a service would easily be offset by reducing the size, duration, delays and higher costs of subsequent UN peace operations. In short, a UNEPS would be far more rapid, reliable and cost-effective.

Nevertheless, experience in politics reminds us that good ideas are seldom sufficient to transform international practices, particularly those entrenched by vested interests twinned to national, regional and organizational priorities.

As it has been nearly five years since the launch of the UNEPS initiative, there has been sufficient time to identify related problems and accomplishments. What are the lessons learned?

In 2004, three organizations – the international World Federalist Movement (WFM), the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (NAPF) and Global Action to Prevent War (GAPW) – assumed leadership roles on a UNEPS Executive Committee.

A UNEPS Secretariat in New York was provided by GAPW. The UNEPS initiative has included at least three excellent conferences and the publication of two books dedicated to describing and promoting the proposal. But, can we do better? Does a process of simply refreshing and updating a proposal constitute a viable political strategy? Is UNEPS simply a good idea whose time hasn't yet come, or are there actions that can be taken to move the proposal forward?

How should stakeholders develop the constituency for UNEPS? The hope at the outset was to ensure that this idea attracted civil society coalitions and multinational networks capable of influencing the development of a dedicated UN service. Although the UNEPS proposal has gained the endorsement of 35 organizations, a widely held perception shared on the periphery (i.e., outside the U.S.) is that an exclusive American club of insiders, located in New York and Washington, are dominating most aspects of the UNEPS initiative.

In Canada, three federal political parties have shown interest in developing a UNEPS. Serious work on a permanent UN Emergency Group started with a 1995 joint DND/DFAIT study, *Towards A Rapid Reaction Capability For The United Nations*. At the WFM-C's national meeting in Winnipeg, consideration of a viable political strategy for a UNEPS would be a useful investment of time.