

A stylized world map composed of a grid of grey dots. Several dots are highlighted in red, indicating specific locations on the map.

# Preparing for a UN Emergency Peace Service

**H. PETER LANGILLE**  
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- Despite years of study and public discussion, the UN still does not have a rapid response military capacity most needed to avert rapidly unfolding mass atrocity crimes. The proposal for a United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS), first launched after the Rwanda genocide, should therefore be revisited and updated.
- UNEPS would create a permanent standing, UN first-responder ready for immediate deployment upon authorization by the Security Council. By ensuring prompt effective response, UNEPS would help prevent armed conflict, protect civilians, help re-building, and contribute to disarmament and collective security.
- The UNEPS proposal requires further elaboration in a blueprint. An in-depth study is needed to provide details into the various requirements at the political, strategic, operational and tactical levels. A review by a panel of independent experts would also be helpful to clarify the potential costs, benefits, options and optimal approach.
- To attract a broad-based constituency of support, the UNEPS initiative needs to be expanded into a more formal network of civil society organizations, academic institutions and inclined member states. It is now time to encourage global centers for UNEPS research and educational outreach.

## 1. A UN Emergency Peace Service

The calls for standby United Nations rapid deployment capacities have been politically contested ever since the adoption of the UN Charter in 1945. In part, this conflict is enshrined in the Charter, whose articles 43 to 48 about the provision of military capacities, left ambiguous the longevity and nature of arrangements. Hence, in 1948, when the first UN-Secretary-General Trygve Lie, proposed a small, dedicated UN force to tackle the violence and chaos in Jerusalem, it was unanimously rejected by the Soviet Union and the United States. And further-reaching proposals for a permanent UN standing force or service have been received with even more skepticism, especially by the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Yet such ideas have been raised time and again by academics, middle- and great-powers and UN Secretary-Generals. For instance in his seminal 1957 study, "A United Nations Peace Force", William R. Frye proposed that the "[e]stablishment of a small, permanent peace force, or the machinery for one could be the first step on the long road toward order and stability. Progress cannot be forced, but it can be helped to evolve. That which is radical one year can become conservative and accepted the next."

A promising proposal is the United Nations Emergency Peace Service (UNEPS), which arose in the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide. It was initially developed within the national studies led by Denmark, Canada and the Netherlands, as well as the 28 member-states who subsequently participated in the multinational initiative of the Friends of Rapid Deployment (FORD). The idea of a UNEPS is intended to create a permanent UN first-responder. UNEPS is to complement existing UN and regional arrangements by filling the critical gap of managing the initial six months of complex emergencies. This option was specifically designed to help prevent armed conflict and genocide, to protect civilians at extreme risk, to ensure prompt start-up of demanding peace operations, and to address human needs where other actors either cannot or will not.

The core principles underlying the UNEPS proposal are that it be: a permanent standing, integrated UN formation; highly trained and well-equipped; ready for immediate deployment upon authorization of the UN Security Council; multidimensional (civilians, police and military); multifunctional (capable of diverse assignments with specialized skills for security,

humanitarian, health and environmental crises); composed of 16,000 dedicated personnel (recruited professionals, selected, trained and employed by the UN); developed to ensure regional and gender equitable representation; co-located at a designated UN base under an operational headquarters and two mobile mission headquarters; at sufficient strength to operate in high-threat environments; and, a service to complement existing UN and regional arrangements. Aside from providing a military formation to deter aggression and maintain security, there would be sufficient police to restore law and order, as well as an array of civilian teams to provide essential services<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Roadblocks and New Momentum

Yet the reception to a UNEPS – or in fact anything that resembles a "Standing UN Army" – has been less than encouraging. As former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali discovered with his 1992 Agenda for Peace -- particularly his call for permanent UN forces under Article 43 and peace enforcement units – there are risks in raising such ambitious ideas. His fallback Supplement to An Agenda for Peace in 1995, stemmed from a recalcitrant Security Council that stipulated reform options would only be acceptable if within the context of existing arrangements.

More recently, an important development has been the emerging norm of the "Responsibility to Protect" (RtoP), based on the assumption that state sovereignty is not a right, but a responsibility. To prevent mass atrocity crimes, RtoP is based on three pillars: first, that it is the individual state's responsibility to protect its population from mass atrocities; second, that the international community has a responsibility to assist

<sup>1</sup> An overview of the UNEPS proposal is within Robert C. Johansen, (ed.), [A United Nations Emergency Peace Service: To Prevent Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity](#), (New York: Institute for Global Policy, 2006). Elaboration may also be found within the thoughtful report of Kavitha Suthanthiraraj, Mariah Quinn and Juan Mendez, [Standing for Change in Peacekeeping Operations](#), (New York: Global Action to Prevent War, 2009). For the agreed background book of the UNEPS initiative see Howard Peter Langille, *Bridging the Commitment—Capacity Gap: A Review of Existing Arrangements and Options for Enhancing UN Rapid Deployment* (Wayne, N.J.: Center for UN Reform Education, August 2002). Available: <http://www.globalcommonsecurity.org/gcs/initiatives/united-nations-emergency-peace-service-unepps/>

the state to fulfill its primary responsibility; and third, if a state cannot or does not want to protect its citizens from mass atrocities, the international community has the responsibility to intervene coercively, and, as a last resort, by military means.

RtoP was adopted by all UN Member States during the 2005 World Summit. In their Summit outcome document, the General Assembly also urged further development of proposals for enhanced rapidly deployable capacities to reinforce peacekeeping operations in crises. However, four years later, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's report on 'Implementing the Responsibility to Protect', continued to deplore that:

"[d]espite years of study and public discussion, the United Nations is still far from developing the kind of rapid response military capacity most needed to handle the sort of rapidly unfolding atrocity crimes referred to in paragraph 139 of the Summit Outcome. I appreciate the efforts by a number of member states to consider the components of such a capacity, including doctrine, training and command and control issues. Much more needs to be done, however, to internationalize such efforts and put them in the larger context of finding better ways to protect civilians." (A/63/677, 12 January 2009)

The UN General Assembly will soon convene again for its annual debate on RtoP. This year's discussion is slated to focus on member-state's preferences for timely and decisive responses as outlined in the so-called third pillar of RtoP. Equally important is the wider appreciation of the link between prevention, protection, rebuilding and a UN rapid deployment capability. The options for implementing R2P – the 'how and with what' questions appear open to debate. At present, it would be premature to raise immediate expectations. For now, there is little hope of the serious cooperation across the UN System and among Member States required to introduce a substantive departure. The Libyan precedent has heightened both the pressure for, and the opposition to, dealing with tragic events in Syria. Both have reinforced global divisions. To its credit, Brazil recently renewed interest in these lingering questions by suggesting a 'responsibility while protecting'. At a minimum, the bar has been raised to demand greater accountability and legitimacy.

It is also problematic that the new UN mantra is to 'do more with less'. This adds to the wider prevailing atmosphere of fatalistic cynicism, inducing paralysis of analysis, action and advocacy. Creative problem-solving on the big issues is now reduced to "just do less and, preferably at little, if any, cost", which precludes what should be considered in the larger context of finding better options.

Of course, the UN attempts to prevent armed conflict, protect civilians and rebuild war-torn societies. Indeed, the UN is almost unique in having effectively coordinated multiple emergencies. But oddly, our one global organization with the responsibility, authority and legitimacy derived from universal membership has no capacity of its own to respond in a timely and decisive manner.

For peace operations – the majority of which are now authorized under Chapter VII with mandates to protect civilians – the UN relies on a standby arrangement system. While this system is helpful in normal circumstances, it is insufficient, and even prone to fail under more demanding crises. The standby arrangements are non-binding, conditional agreements that depend on national governments, as well as the availability of national personnel and resources. Unfortunately, there has been a marked tendency for northern nations to stand by instead of standing-up, incurring routine delays of four to six months, rather than rapid responses.

It is hardly comforting that UN peacekeeping is now confined to post-conflict stabilization, with scant support for preventive action or deployments. A few useful reforms may follow from the UN's New Horizon's initiative and efforts to create more partnerships among regional actors, more standby arrangements and more focal points for more early warning systems. But that is only a slight variation on the same menu offered since 1993.

For example, encouraging regional standby partnerships has long been a UN priority. These should help although they provide little assurance of assistance for demanding operations. As noted, all depend on national decisions and available national resources.

To illustrate, sixteen member-states were attracted to

participate in the multinational Standby High Readiness Brigade (SHIRBRIG)<sup>2</sup>. Formerly considered the most advanced and regionally representative partnership for UN peacekeeping, the SHIRBRIG managed several deployments, but never at its designated brigade strength, nor beyond Chapter VI mandated traditional operations. Disputes among the participating nations frustrated rapid deployment, engagement in robust Chapter VII operations and those that entailed protecting civilians. As the political will waned, the SHIRBRIG's primary contribution became its skeletal standing mission headquarters, its planning element and its professional staff. After being lauded as a partnership model for others to emulate, the SHIRBRIG's dubious record relegated it to the status of only being occasionally helpful. The partnership that appeared so promising on paper in 1994 became operational in 2000 and was disbanded in 2008.

UN peacekeeping operations have been repeatedly supported by EU members and member-led coalitions. The 18 EU Battlegroups (EUBG) were announced as operationally-ready in 2007. In 2008, the UN Secretary General specifically requested their assistance with a crisis unfolding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The EUBG were not provided. To date, they have not been deployed. Several of the lead nations appear ambivalent and reluctant to assume their agreed roles. This EU arrangement may have potential, but it has not proven to be rapid or reliable.

The African Union's five regional standby brigades were announced in 2000 and organized in haste, with two brigades being quickly pressed into service in 2002. Several of these brigades have been busy, repeatedly deployed, and with a few exceptions, very helpful. Their training, professionalism and equipment improved over the past decade, but they do not have the assets required to deploy rapidly. There is good cooperation within a few regions, but not all. It is noteworthy that AU military advisors tend to be strongly supportive of a

<sup>2</sup> Prior to its demise, the following 16 nations had agreed to a specific level of participation within SHIRBRIG: Argentina, Austria, Canada, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden. Seven nations also participated as observers (Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Egypt, Jordan, Latvia and Senegal).

dedicated UN first responder to ensure mission start-up and address the initial stages of demanding operations.

For now, when confronted by fast-breaking crises and violent conflicts there is little prospect of prompt UN action in the short-term. This results in a subsequent requirement for later, larger, more expensive efforts or worse – traditional military approaches, which destroy and divide, seldom providing effective responses or sustainable solutions.

Yet these roadblocks and the current impasse may only be temporal. A deluge of global crises – economic recession and austerity, social inequality and desperation, accelerating climate change and environmental shifts, vast military power and arms proliferation, weak states and refugee flows – combine to present a critical challenge: how might we respond to complex emergencies?

Clearly, it is essential to address the underlying causes of each, with work on deep prevention. Simultaneously it is also imperative to develop a UN capacity to deal with the attendant conflicts and operational demands ahead. In this vein, the idea of a UNEPS needs to be revisited and modified. Hopefully, the following analyses of its key roles and requirements will begin to make such a contribution.

### 3. A Service to Help Prevent Armed Conflict

A principal objective of a UN Emergency Peace Service is to ensure the UN has its own first-responder to help in preventing armed conflict, particularly mass atrocity crimes. It is intended to fill an evident, long-standing gap in the UN system. As stressed within the Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change (A more secure world: our shared responsibility, A/59/565):

“The biggest source of inefficiency in our collective security institutions has simply been an unwillingness to get serious about preventing deadly violence. This is a normative challenge to the United Nations... It is also an operational challenge: the challenge of stopping a Government from killing its own civilians requires considerable military deployment capacity...The biggest failures of the United Nations in civil violence have been in halting ethnic cleansing and genocide...Prompt

and effective response to today's challenges requires a dependable capacity for the rapid deployment of personnel and equipment for peacekeeping and law enforcement."

A UNEPS would address this gap by providing the Organization with both the presence of, and, if necessary, immediate access to, a reliable, UN standing formation. Ideally, any preventive system works best when it seldom has to intervene to stem crises. As with any police or defense effort, it is best to be known to have credible means to deter aggression and the worst of crimes. In practice, this usually works by having a legitimate capacity that is recognized and ready to respond when needed.

To illustrate, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is now recognized worldwide. Having begun to hold individuals accountable for war crimes, it has started to curtail a culture of impunity and criminal behavior. Similarly, UNEPS would complement the ICC, existing UN and regional arrangements with a dedicated ready formation. The deployable elements of UNEPS should be sufficient to deter most, if not all individuals, organizations or parties inclined to mass atrocity crimes.

#### 4. A Service to Help Protect Civilians

Although neither designed for, nor capable of war-fighting, UNEPS includes a sufficiently robust military service to provide self-defence, defence of the mission and protection of civilians in most, if not all cases.

A UNEPS is not at the size or composition for directly engaging a modern army. But that doesn't suggest such a formation couldn't help. If specifically trained and developed for protection tasks, a UNEPS should do a better job in managing mission start-up, securing safe havens, guarding humanitarian corridors, countering spoilers and militias, restoring security, law and order and improving the prospects for rapid deployment into harsh environments.

A deeper 'responsibility while protecting' might also be expected from dedicated UN personnel in a gender-balanced, regionally representative formation, with extensive training and guidance in best practices, appropriate conduct and respect for rules. Appropriate preparation for assigned tasks tends to make them more manageable.

Notably, smaller formations helped to protect civilians at various stages of the conflicts in East Timor, Sierra Leone, the DRC, and Cote D'Ivoire. In others, like Rwanda and Srebrenica, it is also acknowledged that a well-trained force of 5000 would likely have been sufficient to stem the ensuing slaughter.

In the words of Lloyd Axworthy, former Canadian Minister of Foreign Affairs:

"If the objective is to protect people and prevent violence you send a legitimate credible UN presence to start a mission quickly- not wait for 4 to 6 months - then there is far less likelihood of people being murdered, or large scale massive ethnic cleansing. That suggests a dedicated UN mechanism including a range of services- military, police and civilian and capable of using force even when opposed to it - an entity...called a UN Emergency Service..."

#### 5. A Service to Ensure Prompt, Effective Response

The UN has no capacity for rapid deployment to diverse emergencies. Repeatedly, officials have stressed this urgent need, as well as for a strategic reserve, a force multiplier, a robust deterrent capacity, an over-the-horizon security guarantor, well-integrated responses, a means to protect civilians and to attend to human needs in areas of high risk. As noted, a UNEPS is designed to help address each.

Rapid deployment is a difficult process that presents an array of demands. A short-list would include effective decision-making, sound prior planning, ample financing, reliable access to highly-trained, well-equipped personnel, a capacity to lift, move and support, and all within a coherent organizational structure. Missing components, whether in personnel, supportive infrastructure or equipment, cause delays and lead to failures. There has to be prior assurance of capacity, competence and immediate availability of each critical element in the process.

The requirements of rapid, reliable and effective responses to diverse emergencies are manageable, but not within the existing standby arrangements or the arrangements for renting contingent-owned equipment

For a UNEPS, the UN would need to acquire two complete sets of appropriate modern equipment, including two identical sets of vehicles; one for training and the second, pre-packed for immediate staging and deployment. Additional arrangements would also be necessary to ensure strategic and tactical air-lift, logistic support within 30 days, reliable rotation and replacements within 6 months; even an assurance of rapid augmentation, close-air support and extraction if necessary.

As a UNEPS would be permanent and standing, the UN would have a coherent, integrated formation with dedicated personnel trained and equipped within a sound organizational structure. Select elements and assets would be immediately ready to respond and to deploy within twenty-four hours of Security Council authorization.

Governments, rather than relying on members of their own national services, could deploy UNEPS composed of dedicated individuals who volunteered to serve and work directly for the UN. People would be recruited globally to provide gender balance and universal representation. By drawing on the very best of professionals worldwide, the UN could screen, select and train participants to high common standards, ensuring higher sophistication and readiness for various assignments.

The benefits of such a service have been understood for a long time. As Canada's 1995 study on the subject noted, "UN volunteers offer the best prospect of a completely reliable, well-trained rapid reaction capability. Without the need to consult national authorities, the UN could cut responses times significantly, and volunteers could be deployed within hours of a Security Council decision". "Ultimately", the report acknowledged, "a UN rapid reaction capability can be truly reliable only if it no longer depends on Member States of the UN for supply of personnel for peace operations."<sup>3</sup>

A UNEPS should not only be a better, more sophisticated tool, its development might also prompt renewed confidence in the UN as an organization, especially in its capacity and commitment to fulfill

<sup>3</sup> Government of Canada, [Towards A Rapid Reaction Capability For The United Nations](#), (Ottawa: 1995), pp.60-62.

assigned tasks. Frequently at the forefront of dubious excuses for inaction is the claim that there is a lack of political will, particularly within the UN Security Council. At least when you have a well-designed tool there are fewer excuses for failing to attempt a task.

## 6. A Service to Help Re-Build

Complex emergencies may share similarities, but most have distinct needs. As it is multifunctional, UNEPS is designed to address a wider spectrum of emergencies with a variety of useful services. Preventing genocide and mass atrocity crimes would be central to a UNEPS. But UNEPS must also be able to offer other useful services. The more such services are appreciated by the majority of member states, the more likely the prospects of its realization. With a modular formation, deployments can be tailored to various mission-specific requirements.

UNEPS is intended to deliver more assistance faster and, in a more effective manner. Small teams of experts and planners are included to co-ordinate the larger formations' immediate and subsequent responses to disaster assistance, environmental crisis, health and humanitarian emergencies.

As an integrated service, it is not limited to simply stopping direct violence, but also extends to initiating quick-impact and long-term projects. Aside from addressing human needs, this should help to counter structural violence (exploitation and exclusion), and stem cultural violence. With specialists in conflict resolution and mediation, human rights monitors and educators, peacebuilding advisory units, and medical teams, there is a far better prospect of establishing the basis for follow-on efforts to restore good governance and sustainable security.

## 7. A More Cost-Effective Service

Of course, a UNEPS would incur costs, as well as benefits. Its development and maintenance would have to be funded through the regular UN budget as a shared expense of the 193 UN member states. As proposed, it entails a start-up cost of approximately \$2.5 billion and annual recurring costs of about \$1 billion.

To put these costs in context, the 15 largest countries spent \$1.6 trillion on armaments in 2010. Total expenditure on peacekeeping operations from 1948 to 2010 amounted to \$69 billion. It is also noteworthy that the approved peacekeeping budget for the 16 operations over the past year (from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012) is approximately US \$7.84 billion. Repeatedly, tragic crises such as those in Cambodia, Rwanda, Srebrenica, Sierra Leone, Kosovo, Darfur, the DRC and Southern Sudan have demonstrated that the costs of inaction or delayed action are simply too high. By contrast a UNEPS would require a relatively small investment.

Given a UNEPS' potential to prevent and deter, it should help to reduce the number of operations required. With the potential to respond rapidly and reliably, it might also stem the need for later, larger and more expensive operations. In return, the cost savings should be substantive

## 8. A Service to Prompt Disarmament, Development and Collective Security

The wider potential of a UNEPS or similar entity (for prevention, protection and more) has been understood for over fifty years. As officials in the US State Department formerly acknowledged,

There is an inseparable relationship between the scaling down of national armaments on the one hand and the building up of international peacekeeping machinery and institutions on the other. Nations are unlikely to shed their means of self-protection in the absence of alternative ways to safeguard their legitimate interests. This can only be achieved through the progressive strengthening of international institutions under the United Nations and by creating a United Nations Peace Force to enforce the peace as the disarmament process proceeds.<sup>4</sup>

Clearly, the building-up of a UNEPS would be a supportive step in advancing disarmament, as well as the four priorities of the last World Summit: development, peace and collective security, human

<sup>4</sup> United States, State Department, Freedom From War, Washington, D.C., 1961.

rights and the rule of law and, strengthening of the United Nations.

Of course, a UNEPS is no panacea or cure-all. It is an agency for first response that would help to complement the wider UN system, which it would also depend upon.

If broadly supported, a UNEPS might begin to revitalize a semblance of common and sustainable security. That is a step toward saving succeeding generations from the scourge of war. It is also another means to free up enormous resources to address other pressing problems.

## 9. Moving Forward


As we move ahead, it may help to review lessons learned from the efforts to develop a UN rapid deployment capacity in the mid 90s. These lessons guided the roles and design of a UNEPS. As with the proposal, seven of these lessons remain relevant to any discussion of timely and decisive options for stemming mass atrocity crimes.

Historically, it was understood that similar proposals for some form of UN standing force or service only attract serious public interest and political support following big wars and genocides.

Second, such tragic events only captivate high-level attention and motivate related efforts for a period of two years, although a desire to resolve the problem lingers.

Third, prior preparation of a coherent proposal is essential to make progress. On previous occasions, when the need was most apparent, the preparation was not. Few, if any, ideas had been developed to the point where they might have influence.

Fourth, there was an evident need for a broadly appealing idea. The specific terminology mattered. There was widespread resistance to proposing a UN standing force, a UN Legion or UN rapid reaction brigade. A military formation alone is insufficient to address the diverse requirements of complex emergencies when people need more help than an armed force provides.



Fifth, a permanent UN formation would only be cost-effective and sustainable if it had a capacity to manage diverse challenges. Relatively small teams of specialists are able to plan and coordinate a larger formations response to various tasks. It is both possible and essential to develop a more sophisticated multidimensional and multifunctional service.

Sixth, to have a meaningful impact, any proposal needs a broad-based constituency of support. Cooperative efforts are required world-wide. A coalition or network of civil society organizations and cooperative member states will be critical.

Finally, the official preference has been for pragmatic incremental reforms, which are easier, cheaper and politically risk-free. However, very few of these pragmatic reforms succeeded, survived or made a substantial difference. The existing arrangements have inherent limitations that cannot be modified or revised to ensure rapid, reliable or effective responses. While the more ambitious plans for a UN standing formation have yet to attract sufficient support, it is highly probable, if not inevitable, that they will eventually be needed.

A central objective in developing the UNEPS proposal is to have a better idea ready for a moment when the need is evident. Recent events, shifts and system failures suggest that moment may arise shortly.

The UNEPS proposal is a work in progress, which now requires further elaboration in a blueprint. An in-depth study is needed to provide details into the various requirements at the political, strategic, operational and tactical levels. A review by a panel of independent experts would also be helpful to clarify the potential costs, benefits, options and optimal approach. To both familiarize UN officials with this option and draw on their expertise, it would be beneficial to initiate a consultative process with the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations, Field Support, Political Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Office of the Special Advisor on the Prevention of Genocide.

Another objective underpinning the effort is to attract a broad-based constituency of support. Progress is evident as the idea has evolved into a global initiative - the UNEPS initiative is now being co-directed by Global Action to Prevent War and the World Federalist Movement-Canada.

Such promising efforts need to be expanded into a more formal network of civil society organizations, academic institutions and inclined member states. It is now time to encourage global centers for UNEPS research and educational outreach.

Prior preparation tends to influence the outcome in most emergencies. It is time to prepare for a UN Emergency Peace Service.





### About the Author

**Dr. H. Peter Langille** directs 'Global Common Security i3' in London, (Canada) where he specializes in peace and conflict studies, UN peace operations, global challenges, conflict resolution and mediation, and independent analysis of defense and security policy. He was formerly an office of primary responsibility on the core working group of the Canadian Government study, Towards A Rapid Reaction Capability For The United Nations.

### Imprint

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | Global Policy and Development  
Hiroshimastrasse 28 | 10785 Berlin | Germany

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung | New York Office  
747 Third Avenue | Suite 22B | New York, NY 10017 | USA

Responsible:  
Dr. Werner Puschra, Executive Director, FES New York

Tel.: ++1-212-687-0208 | Fax: ++1-212-687-0261  
[www.fes-globalization.org/new\\_york/index.htm](http://www.fes-globalization.org/new_york/index.htm)

To order publications:  
[jlant@fesny.org](mailto:jlant@fesny.org)

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