

UN Peace-making and Peacekeeping: Opportunity and Challenge

Superpower acquiescence and cooperation has in the past two years allowed the United Nations to play its intended role as peacemaker and peacekeeper in Iran-Iraq, Afghanistan, Namibia, and now perhaps in Central American and even Cambodia. These roles, originally pioneered and long supported by Canada, had fallen into some political disuse – even with several peacekeeping forces carrying on – but they have returned with increased scope and impact in this new international climate. There is no country better placed than Canada – especially during its term on the Security Council – to take the lead in building on this new opportunity to institutionalize these arrangements.

As 1 April 1989 showed in Namibia – when one of the largest and most important UN operations in history almost miscarried – both the political and technical machinery of the UN for these operations needs to be greatly strengthened. Even though there will always be distinctive problems and time-pressures with each operation, the Namibian experience should be taken as a firm warning that the Secretary-General needs more standing means and authority to plan, prepare and stage UN activities. He also needs the political clout to be able to cut through unnecessary blockages in New York, at the very least to find remedies when delegations have, through their own nitpicking debates and delays, jeopardized agreed deadlines for getting a UN force on the ground. Strong political support is needed, especially from the countries with most experience in sending their nationals on these missions, to back firmer demands by the Secretary-General for his capacity to proceed or, when necessary – even at the cost of sometimes missing an opportunity – to delay proceeding when conditions are dangerously unprepared.

The principal peacekeeping countries, like Canada, now have the right and responsibility to pursue the agenda of possible reinforcements to these systems, in the UN and elsewhere. Timely topics include not only the political processes and bureaucratic resources involved, but also the possibilities of standing reserve forces or nuclei; the establishment of multilateral risk reduction centres; new mediatory functions and facilities; the relationships between UN and regional efforts; possible new powers and new roles for peacekeepers (for example, see page 41 below); new techniques and technologies to aid in peacekeeping; and not least, the more satisfactory financing of these and other activities of the UN.