Peacekeeping

From its first UN Emergency Force in the 1950s until the end of the Cold War in 1990, the United Nations established 15 peacekeeping missions. The idea behind these interventions was that, by separating the belligerent forces, the situation could be sufficiently stabilized to permit the negotiation and implementation of a peaceful settlement. Since UN peacekeepers were not equipped to combat armies that were determined to renew hostilities, UN peacekeeping operations depended on the consent of the warring parties.

The necessity of obtaining consent encouraged peacekeepers to abide by guiding principles of impartiality and minimal use of force. These missions, now seen as "traditional missions," consisted largely of lightly armed peacekeepers who were deployed along a buffer zone between warring factions, and who were dependent on the good will and co-operation of the factions.

Starting in 1990, the UN Security Council authorized a large number of new peacekeeping missions in several countries, including Angola, Cambodia, Somalia, and the former Yugoslavia. By mid-1994, some 80,000 UN peacekeepers were deployed on 16 missions around the world.

Second-generation peacekeeping

The guiding principles of traditional peacekeeping (maintaining the consent of parties, being impartial, and using minimum force) proved ineffective in the new operating environment of intra-state conflicts. Today's conflicts are characterized by numerous, undisciplined parties to the conflict; ineffective ceasefires; absence of law and order; collapsed infrastructure; and a battlefield with no front line. Peacekeepers found themselves dealing with much more complex environments in which the military were but one part of the solution.

In the late 1990s, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan convened an expert panel to analyse UN peacekeeping. This led to the report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (called the Brahimi Report). One of the most significant lessons learned during the mid-90s was: Security is necessary for post-conflict reconstruction, but a co-ordinated strategy engaging a broad range of civilian institutions is also required.

However, there are occasions when regional organizations or coalitions of willing parties are able to deploy and undertake missions that the United Nations has authorized but is not able or willing to undertake. The deployment of French forces to the Ivory Coast and to the European Union-led mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, as well as the positive United States response to the call by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to intervene in Liberia, reflect this trend.