Chapter 2 - Operational Imperative

Human rights are increasingly recognized as one of several critical causal factors in conflict. Depending on whether they are protected or violated, human rights contain an operational imperative that can have either a causal impact or a preventive impact on conflict. UN operations can harness this operational imperative to help achieve durable peace as occurred in El Salvador. Alternatively, UN operations as in Somalia or Cambodia, can marginalize human rights and run the real risk that ongoing human rights violations will impair or totally negate UN efforts.

UN field operations now range across a wide spectrum from monitoring cease-fires, helping to implement peace agreements, delivering humanitarian assistance, to peace enforcement. As most effectively evidenced by the early years of the ex-Yugoslavia crisis, "human rights protection is essential to the success of any such operation".[8] In addition to the operational imperatives, "as long as the UN avoids tackling these [human rights] issues effectively, it is seriously damaging its own credibility and thereby its capacity to undertake peace-keeping and peace-building operations in other contexts and countries in the future."[9]

In this chapter, section one will first look at the causal relationship of human rights violations and conflict, and then extrapolate this cause and effect relationship to the conduct of UN operations. Section two will review some of the real strategic and tactical benefits for the UN, and in particular a UN operation, in taking human rights seriously. Section three will look at the related danger of confusing impartiality with unquestioned inaction in the face of human rights violations. Section four will look at the operational imperative of rapid reaction to forestall or minimize conflict, while section five discusses the inevitable long term aspects of the operational imperative.

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[8] p.2 of summary of *Peace-keeping and Human Rights*, Amnesty International, IOR/40/01/94, January 1994. This AI study which builds upon seminal papers by Andrew Clapham and Meg Henry, includes AI's 15-point program for implementing human rights in international peace-keeping operations.

[9] ibid.