

Calling All Regio-Cops

Union, it is high time for the world to recognize that neither option will come to pass. Washington does not have the will for it, and the U.N. (thanks largely to American stinginess) does not have the way.

Out of this vacuum, however, a new system is emerging on the ground, crisis by crisis. Call it the rule of the regio-cops. It is a hybrid system, dependent on both U.N. legitimation and local muscle. To work, the new system needs regional powers and organizations to do the dirty work of peacekeeping and peacemaking. But such regional forces are increasingly being trained and pressured to act in accordance with U.N. norms, and typically go in under the auspices of Security Council resolutions.

This was the model followed for East Timor in September 1999, when President Bill Clinton happily accepted Australia's offer to send in combat troops to stop Indonesia's murderous militias—even as the U.S. president took the lead in organizing a multinational response and orchestrating a U.N. resolution. It was the approach in Kosovo, too. The United States insisted on using NATO to drive out Slobodan Milosević—mindful of how U.N. troops had abjectly failed to stop earlier atrocities in Bosnia—but ultimately acted under the U.N. flag.

Now the pattern is spreading, gingerly, to western Africa. This past summer, when Clinton announced he was sending U.S. military trainers to Nigeria, it was an implicit recognition not just of the democratic government's newfound legitimacy, but of the fact that, as the region's major power, Nigeria must play the key role in stopping the atrocities in Sierra Leone—no matter how brutally Nigeria's troops may have acted there before.

ON THE CHEAP

Will this pattern spread further? Should it? To answer this, some hard facts must be faced. The current dispute over peace-making usually centers on whether U.N. resources should be beefed up to deal with certain situations—typically civil conflicts that hover precariously between peace and outright war—into which U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan has boldly pushed the world body. The report of last summer's U.N. peacekeeping commission, chaired by Lakhdar Brahimi, sharply analyzes the current system's flaws and lays out a corrective plan. At the U.N. Millennium Assembly in New York in September, leader after leader took the rostrum to give explicit or implicit support to the Brahimi prescriptions. Among those leaders was President Clinton, who called for a greater U.N. role in humanitarian interventions.

But to think that the Brahimi panel's advice will be carried out, now or ever, is to strain common sense to the breaking point. Demands for a more robust U.N. force, including combat-ready "standby" units, long predate the fall of communism—and there is little reason to think they will succeed now where they have failed in the past. While the new peacekeeping recommendations (which would cost an estimated \$200 million a year to implement) were being touted in New York, a skinflint U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C., was trying to cut even more from the U.N.'s present peacekeeping budget. At one point, members of Congress actually tried to entirely eliminate African peacekeeping in order to meet budget caps—this despite the efforts of Richard Holbrooke, Washington's U.N. ambassador, to give Africa