

Chapter 12 Conclusion: Political Will and Operational Professionalism

Human Rights Imperative

United Nations field operations have become increasingly common and increasingly complex. In light of Somalia, Rwanda, and Yugoslavia, they certainly need to become more effective.

In the attempt to evolve better ways to handle complex emergencies, it is increasingly evident that human rights is both a causal factor, and one of the keys for effective solutions. Quite apart from the UN's human rights legal and moral imperatives, ignoring human rights threatens and at times can totally preclude success in UN operations.

The operational imperative of human rights for UN peace-keeping, peace-making, or other field operations, can no longer be denied. Whether this operational imperative will be acted upon depends upon political will and operational professionalism.

Political Will

The political will of UN member states is central to the evolution of human rights in UN field operations. It is incumbent upon those member states who do understand the fundamental importance of human rights to UN operations, to convince the others. Traditional arguments based on legal and moral imperatives or duties have not proven to be very persuasive. Hopefully the operational benefits or imperatives of mandating UN operations to deal with human rights will be more compelling. Concurrently, member states taking a lead in this issue, can provide additional support through such mechanisms as human rights standby mechanisms.

The political will of senior UN bureaucrats is almost as important as the political will of states. Some individuals need to be convinced of the operational imperatives, and perhaps are not clear on the legal duties of the UN. More problematic is the organizational infighting which to a degree is natural to any large organization. However, the level of internal UN politics should not be allowed to threaten core UN human rights values and institutions, or undermine mechanisms such as the nascent concept of human rights operations.

The recommendation that the UN designate a single UN office of primary responsibility for human rights operations, addresses just one manifestation of this UN turf fighting. That and other such decisions should not be decided by attrition or default. Member states and the