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The Peacekeeper's Handbook.

Review by: Shelford Bidwell

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THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PEACEKEEPING

Shelford Bidwell

The Peacekeeper's Handbook. Published by International Peace Academy.
1978.

IT is strange that when so much academic attention has been paid to the various uses of armed forces in international relationships, so little has been devoted to the actual activities of the multinational contingents raised under the aegis of the United Nations for peacekeeping purposes. They seem to be taken for granted. It may be because sometimes, especially in the Middle East, they seem to be part of a face-saving manoeuvre designed to provide a smoke-screen at that point in the unending war by proxy between the two super-powers when neither can afford to let its client arrive at a point of total defeat, or to allow the conflict to reach such a stage that their own armed forces may have to intervene, with all the dangerous consequences that might follow. It follows from this view that the composition of a peacekeeping force, apart from some guarantee of its neutrality, or its professional skills, seems irrelevant. Too much efficiency or zeal might be a positive disadvantage: all it needs to do to be effective is to exist. It is a means of imposing peace, by proxy, just as the conflict was by proxy.

The International Peace Academy (IPA), in effect a sort of staff college for peacekeepers, whose role is 'the development of skills and techniques for greater efficiency within peacekeeping forces', takes a loftier and more optimistic view. It sees peacekeeping (also *peace-making* and *peace-building*, terms of its own coinage) as a whole new dimension in the use of military forces and able to produce positive results.

'Peacekeeping' is, in fact, an ambitious description: the presence of 'peacekeeping' forces has never *kept* the peace, for the simple reason that they have neither the authority nor the military ability to do any such thing. Their function is restorative. What they provide is a pacific, disinterested, impartial agency which, at the moment when the belligerents feel so disposed, or are under pressure from their sponsors, can separate the two sides, demarcate truce lines, arrange the exchange of prisoners of war and report infractions of the truce agreement. They can exert a calming influence at the psychological moment when both sides are mentally and physically exhausted and only too ready to call a halt to combat. These are very valuable functions in themselves, and it is important not to blame and certainly not ridicule the various United Nations forces for their impotence in the face of, for instance, the determined aggression which brought about the Arab-Israeli clashes of 1967 and 1973, the prolonged cannonade along the line of the Suez Canal or the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. It is equally important, because it is unrealistic, to claim too much for an activity difficult enough in itself, but also hedged around with constraints designed to make it impossible for a permanent United Nations military agency to exercise even a hint of supra-national authority, or, indeed, even to exist.

This is all very well, as there are good political reasons, understood by all shades of opinion inside the United Nations, why this should be so, but it is very unsatisfactory from a military point of view, as the consequence is that there is no staff of the United Nations comparable to a national General Staff capable of contingency planning, training, organisation or the development of peacekeeping methods. The post of Military Adviser to the Secretary-General lapsed in 1969, when he was replaced by a military Liaison Officer. The Field Operations Service Department is purely civilian and concerned with the direction and administrative support of a United Nations force and it is formed ad hoc from United Nations contract personnel. No United Nations machinery exists to provide member states who, by virtue of their neutral or uncommitted stance are eligible for service, with guidance. As far as is known, no reports or despatches are made by force commanders evaluating their experiences. (Or if they are made, they are not circulated.) This is a formula to guarantee confusion, and there can be little doubt that in past operations there has been a good deal of it. Good military forces are eminently adaptable, but even the best cannot be committed to an unaccustomed operation differing so radically from their normal role without careful training and indoctrination *if this involves in some way the use or carrying of weapons*.

There is no difficulty at the extremes. If the question of enforcement arises as, for instance, carried out by units of the Indian Army in the Congo, the soldiers' task is straightforward. Objectives for capture or positions to be defended are indicated, or the troops are ordered to disarm or pacify indicated bodies of troops using military force, if necessary *à outrance*. To furnish observers, supervise elections or give aid in civil disaster are straightforward tasks, requiring only briefing.

It is the mid-positions that present difficulty: the use of 'minimum force', or the use of weapons for personal protection only, and this difficulty is redoubled if the belligerents have no stable government responsible for their actions, as seems to be the case with UNIFIL in the Lebanon at the moment. Indeed, it can be argued that these alternative roles are incompatible, not so much from the point of view of military expertise as from motivation. Even the sophisticated regular rank and file of the British Army, who have always been obliged to undertake multiple roles, find it difficult to switch from the instant, conditioned aggressive response expected in one set of circumstances to the extreme restraint required when acting 'in aid of the civil power'. It is in no way derogatory of the devoted contingents of UN peacekeeping forces to say that their rank and file may be simple, unsophisticated and politically unaware; trained only in discipline, weapon handling and minor tactics. On the negative side, they may not take kindly to giving way to the threat of force. (Who after all wants soldiers who allow themselves to be tamely disarmed or kidnapped?) On the positive side, they must be able to meet the high demands made on their patience and tact, which in turn requires more than an understanding of the goals and attitudes of both sides. 'A peacekeeping soldier will be required to adjust, in both attitudes and approach, to the situation in which he is involved and to the motivations and the cultural backgrounds of the people and groups who are the parties to the dispute' (p. 1/2).

These obstacles are by no means insuperable, once it is accepted that a proportion of training time must be given to the peacekeeping role, and it is accepted that other roles must suffer to some extent accordingly. (For

example, as the British Army in Germany devotes part of its training time, which is barely adequate to keep highly mechanised and technical formations at the topmost pitch of training, to its paramilitary and civil role in Northern Ireland. But there are many experienced officers who consider that where there is no obvious or immediate primary military role, a secondary one keeps all ranks busy and gives them a sense of a worthwhile mission; none more so than peacekeeping.)

These are the psychological factors. Soldiers, however, are practical people and, in a well-trained and disciplined force at any rate, their officers should have no great anxiety about the way their men will behave. It is not goals and ideals which bother them but precise details of their mission and the mechanics of achieving it. The mere mention of a new mission causes them to rivet their attention on a whole catalogue of factors: the chain of command, communications, logistics, transport, and all the minor tactics and techniques of the task they are likely to face. The apparently simple tasks of establishing a road-block, or traffic control point, or an observation post, cannot be left to be thought out on the spot by a junior NCO: they are full of pitfalls. How does one persuade a belligerent patrol that has clearly lost its way to return to its own territory, without a common language, and without threatening it with weapons? All this may seem small beer to those who are concerned with the larger issues of diplomacy and great-power rivalry, but a false step by the soldier could prejudice the whole operation.

The vicissitudes of the units of the various United Nations forces which in the early years threaded their way through the hazards of peacekeeping are seldom known in detail, but in the course of time a whole body of practical knowledge has been built up, largely by the 'Nordic' contingents and by the Canadians who have played a regular part. This has been codified by the International Peace Academy and published as a *vade mecum* in a stout cover with rings and punched pages, with room for additions and with all the information the staff, the regimental and the non-commissioned officer might require both for training and in the field, down to specimen forms for every sort of situation report with instructions on how they should be completed. (This may make the reader smile, but when under stress it is wonderfully composing to be made to collect one's wits and signal the facts; just as it is reassuring to the recipient to learn precisely what the nature of an incident is.)

The Peacekeeper's Handbook is a *tour de force*, and typically English, for all the internationality of its provenance. It begins with a perfunctory genuflection in the general direction of the non-violent theory of peacekeeping, but such airy stuff is dismissed by page 2: thereafter it is pragmatic and practical, beginning with a clear and simple exposition of how the United Nations is organised and how peacekeeping activities are legitimised and directed. The military reader will notice at once that it is so laid out that the subject matter can be used to construct a training course for say, a cadre of NCOs and junior officers and also as notes for lectures or discussion periods. It is always possible to criticise such manuals in detail, but a close reading prompts only the following comments.

Health and hygiene are duly mentioned, but require emphasis. It may not be convenient to keep inoculations topped up, but all potential peacekeepers should be warned of the more elementary hazards of foreign travel which can lay whole companies low with prostrating and undignified stomach ailments. Much seems to depend on the exact location of

demilitarised zones. It might be advisable therefore always to include an engineer survey section to run a traverse along boundaries and a supply of beacons, posts and flags to mark them.

The weakest part is the one on intelligence and information. The term 'intelligence' is not used, as it is presumed to have unhappy political connotations, only 'information', which fogs the issue, since 'information' by common definition is the raw material and 'intelligence' is the assessment. The author seems to think that all information sources are clandestine and therefore likely somehow to offend the belligerents, whereas in practice ninety per cent. of reliable information is overt or passive. Looking at the problem from military first principles it seems essential for the commanders of peacekeeping forces to have a clear picture of the situation before they can act, and this requires an adequate information flow from as many diverse sources as possible and a strong, properly trained staff to evaluate it, otherwise there is a real danger of the force becoming a mere symbolic presence. The crucial area for peacekeeping is on the frontiers of Israel, where both sides are equipped with advanced weapons, whose presence requires advanced methods of surveillance and highly trained operators and observers. For instance, only the trained observers of air defence units could hope to fill in the form on V/61 of the handbook, using only optical means. Item 4B is impossible to evaluate accurately by eye and 4C requires extensive and recondite knowledge. A start has been made to meet this need, although by bilateral agreement and not under United Nations authority, in Sinai. That is a permanent installation, but there are a number of locating and surveillance equipments designed for use with field forces. They are capable of being sited effectively in buffer zones and their use would in no way infringe territorial rights, any more than an optically equipped observer post. It would be well worth considering their use. They can detect and measure aircraft movement, the displacement of weapons into restricted areas and also the point sources of artillery and mortar fire, which might prove useful in a confused situation such as exists in the Lebanon.

Having made these comments it is only necessary to add that as a practical manual *The Peacekeeper's Handbook* is wholly admirable and no doubt will be even better when the final chapter on the law and international peacekeeping, not yet printed, is included. Where it is unsatisfactory is in the area of 'doctrine'; a better word than 'theory'. It is not so much that the doctrine is supported by false argument or analysis: it is not argued or analysed at all. The point of departure is an assumption, a matter of faith: 'The theoretical concept of international peace-keeping is that the control of violence in interstate and intrastate conflict is possible without the use of force or enforcement measures' (p. 1/1). This to be achieved by 'person to person, group to group relationships'. This may perhaps be effective, sometimes, in inter-communal strife, but it is not argued. As a general statement it is unlikely to convince anyone with experience of that most obdurate form of human antagonism. Nor can it have any bearing on the decisions of governments, with whom the peacekeepers have no form of contact.

In their arguments, the advocates of such idealistic methods of peacekeeping implicitly judge the effectiveness of these methods by the long periods of comparative peace, and so fall into the fallacy of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*: whereas what really seems to have been the case is that the Arabs and Israelis (the theatre which must be the touchstone of any

peacekeeping exercises) are only capable of short bursts of high intensity warfare, and when political or military factors indicate that some advantage might accrue from full-scale offensive action it is begun without any respect or regard for the presence or absence of a United Nations peacekeeping force.

The doctrine on the use of force and 'enforcement' is ambiguous. Having been summarily rejected in the introductory chapter there is a long note, significantly in bold type (V/38), indicating that there are circumstances when force is justified—'when the UN forces are under direct attack from the forces of one of the parties engaged or from extremist elements . . . '—and the action in Congo/Katanga is cited. Apart from any inconsistency or departure from what appear at bottom to be the fundamentally moral principles adhered to be the IPA, this is historically naive. No pure question of peacekeeping was involved in the Congo. Rightly or wrongly, a military movement for secession was put down by military means without any reference to the population involved, for purely political reasons. (And the consequences in African affairs are with us yet.)

To say this is not to labour a point or belabour the IPA. The phenomenon of UN peacekeeping is likely to be a permanent and valuable feature in international relationships. The IPA performs a valuable service in encouraging it and studying how it can be made more effective in the most practical way. But, as the opening sentence of its manual says: 'Every endeavour . . . must be supported by a theoretical framework'. To put practice first is realistic, but what is wanted now is a rigorous analysis of all the operations undertaken to date to determine the extent of achievements and failures, and also to examine how they can be made more effective in the future as regards questions of principle and doctrine.