

The Politics of Peacekeeping



The UN's 16 peacekeeping operations cost \$3.4 billion a year.
UN machinery in Cambodia where the UN supervised the 1993 election.

~ a question of member state commitment



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- The concept of peace
- International security
- Conflict resolution
- Future possibilities

The aim of traditional diplomacy was often limited to a stable balance of power: whether the balance conformed to justice was of lesser concern. But peace envisaged by the UN Charter is a just peace: take that moral dimension away and we are back to the disorder and the injustice of power politics.'

Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, 1986

United Nations peacekeeping is an overwhelmingly military affair. According to the UN, there have been 35 peacekeeping operations between June 1948 and January 1995; exactly half of them are currently taking place. With the exception of former Yugoslavia, they were all in what is usually called the Third World – 11 peacekeeping operations in the Middle East, 11 in Africa, four in Central America, four in South East Asia/the Pacific, four in the Indian Subcontinent and one in Europe. Over 650,000 military personnel have served as 'blue helmets' since 1948. In November 1994, 74,625 military and civilian police personnel were serving in peacekeeping operations.¹

The upsurge in UN peacekeeping operations can be measured in dollars. Since 1948 the UN has spent about \$12.4 billion on peacekeeping, while the annual cost to the UN of the 16 current operations is \$3.4 billion. Put in the context of global military expenditure, the figures are even more telling. The national military expenditures of the 185 member states of the UN amounted to \$815 billion in 1991, a figure that equals the combined income of 49 per cent of the world's poor. Around 30 million people are employed in the armed forces of the UN member states and 1.5 million are working in military

research and development.² In other words, the members of the UN choose to spend 215 times more on warkeeping than on peacekeeping and engage 440 times more soldiers and military researchers than blue helmets. Furthermore, UN peacekeepers have been deployed only in a fraction of all the wars – about 150, depending on definition – that have taken place since 1945. The upsurge in UN peacekeeping operations has happened since the mid-1980s. Of the 35 peacekeeping operations since 1948, 22 have been initiated since 1988.

The 13 peacekeeping operations undertaken before 1988 were classic in the sense that their mandates had to do with observing the behaviour of conflicting parties, monitoring cease-fires, controlling buffer zones and preventing resumption of hostilities. After mid-1988 – due to the changes in the then Soviet Union, the new political thinking of the Gorbachev era and the subsequent ending of the Cold War – new tasks were added and more new missions decided.

But UN practice still, too much, works on the premise that international security is predominantly a military affair, with little recognition of the idea of peace as a process which requires an 'army' of many and varied civilian professionals deployed over time to heal human beings and entire societies.

In summary, UN peacekeeping operations are characterized by:

- an orientation exclusively on wars in the Third World with the large majority of peacekeeping personnel contributed by Third World states themselves
- a narrow concept of peace – understood as putting an end to wars and moving towards a settlement, often negotiated by parties other than the peacekeeping operation personnel – such as the Secretary-General, various powerful countries and at *ad hoc* conferences
- a focus on direct violence but not structural violence
- a focus on cure rather than prevention
- 'selective security' – only a tiny fraction of the world's post-1945 wars have been dealt with by the UN Security Council
- extremely small budgets in comparison with the world's military and arms export budgets
- an inclination towards military operations with an extremely small capacity for on-the-ground peacemaking and peacebuilding.



A UN peacekeeper wears a protective mask in Bosnia. The blue helmets of the UN peacekeeping troops have become a familiar sight in the world's conflict zones.

The shape of UN peacekeeping

Peacekeeping, the most visible of all UN activities, works under the remit of the UN Security Council which aims to implement peacekeeping resolutions that abide by the spirit of the Charter. The General Assembly also has certain responsibilities. Last, but not least, the Secretary-General is always deeply involved in setting up peacekeeping operations.

The UN Charter

Chapters 6 and 7 of the UN Charter spell out the basis for UN peacekeeping operations. Chapter 7 requires all members to contribute armed forces, assistance and facilities to the Security Council and allow free passage for UN troops, as well as stipulating that members shall hold 'immediately available national airforce contingents for combined international enforcement action'. These provisions, it states, should be carried out by the Security Council 'with the assistance of the Military Staff Committee'. Among other things it is clearly stated that this Committee shall be responsible under the Security Council for the strategic direction of any armed forces placed at the disposal of the Security Council.

However, member states have not made military forces – nor peacekeeping units – available on standby, while the Military Staff Committee has been prevented from doing any serious work by a widespread reluctance among countries to have their military personnel operating collectively under UN command and flag rather than under national command.

A reasonable interpretation of Chapter 7 is that collectively defending a UN member, repelling an aggressor or deterring a potential aggressor is quite compatible with the Charter. However, one must be sceptical about the legitimacy of military attack, counter-aggression, selective bombing – particularly of civilian targets – and punishment actions.

The Charter gives priority to the use of peaceful means and views military action as a last resort to be employed only when everything else has been tried and 'proved to be inadequate'. In fact, there is a quite good in-built theory of conflict-resolution in the Charter. Chapters 6 and 7 form a fairly



functional and efficient progressive scheme of action within the formulation of the overall goals of the Charter.



With a limited mandate to intervene militarily, the UN's job is to accompany aid convoys to UN 'safe havens'. UN peacekeepers trudge through the snow in Bosnia.

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The Security Council

The UN Security Council consists of five permanent members and 10 members elected for two-year periods by the UN General Assembly. Unlike the General Assembly, the Security Council is able to take decisions which are binding. There has to be unanimity among the five permanent members of the Security Council. A veto by any one of them can stop any decision – a right that all five have exercised at one time or another.³

A dispute can be brought to the attention of the Security Council by any country. The Council usually recommends a peaceful settlement, makes an investigation, asks the Secretary-General to provide his Good Offices and sends a representative to the conflict area. It passes resolutions on measures to be taken by itself and all UN members and urges the parties to undertake certain actions or refrain from certain actions, in order not to aggravate the situation further and to start the path towards a peaceful settlement. With a few exceptions, the Security Council initiates peacekeeping operations.

Critics of the UN have suggested reforming the system. Some of the remedies may be to limit the Security Council's veto power; change the division of labour between the Security Council, the Secretariat and the General Assembly; diffuse the power of the Council; and invite new members. Reformers propose moving in the direction of democratization and genuine universalism.⁴

The General Assembly

This is the UN's plenary body, the main deliberative forum in which each member state has one vote. Decisions on important questions related to peace and security, admission of new members and budgetary matters require a two-thirds majority. Otherwise, a simple majority is used.

Among its tasks are issues related to international peace, disarmament, dispute settlement (if not dealt with by the Security Council) and human rights. It initiates studies, promotes international cooperation, respect for international law, human rights, elects non-permanent members of the Security Council, approves the UN budget and

elects the Secretary-General.

Of particular relevance for peacekeeping is the Uniting for Peace resolution of November 1950, which provided that the General Assembly would meet to recommend collective measures in situations where the Security Council was unable to deal with a breach of peace or act of aggression. It acknowledged that the Council should be handling the more coercive of the peacekeeping and enforcement tasks but made provisions for General Assembly action when a veto led to stalemate in the Council.

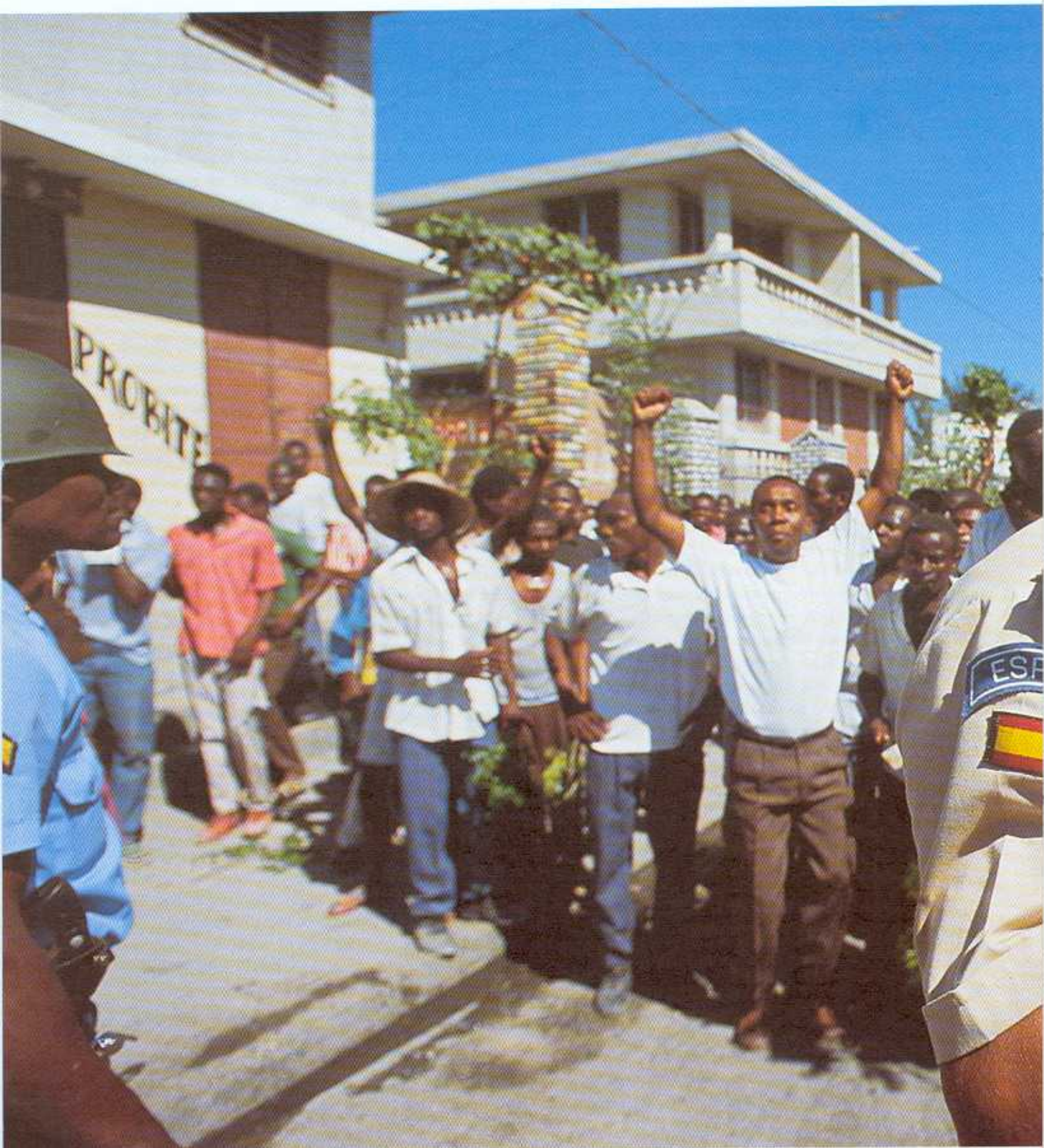
Many suggest that the General Assembly should be given more of a say in matters related to peacekeeping. Conflicts should be brought before the Assembly and discussed in what could be a much broader framework than the Security Council. The Assembly could arrange hearings between the parties involved and with military and conflict-resolution experts. This would provide the Security Council with background analyses and recommendations based on better informed discussions.

The Secretary-General

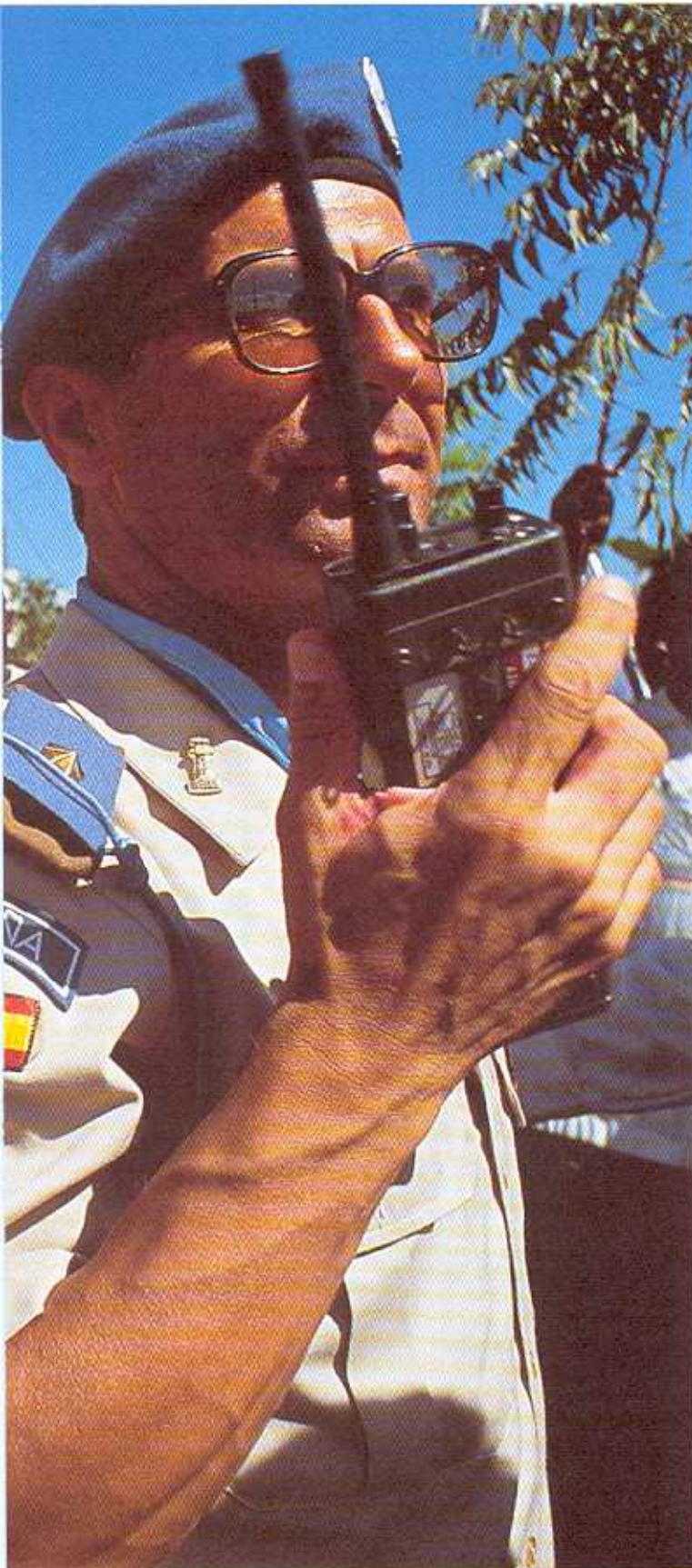
The provisions for the functions of Secretary-General are the only concessions made in the Charter to supra-nationality. They state that he/she may bring any important matter to the attention of the Security Council; that the Secretary-General and the Secretariat, which today employs some 11,000 people⁵, shall not seek or receive instructions from any government and that no government shall seek to influence them.

The Charter's definition of the job is extremely complex and not without tension between different roles. The Secretary-General is the very emblem of the UN and its administrative top manager. In addition, he/she is entrusted with a variety of functions by the Security Council, the General Assembly and other bodies. He/she is 'equal parts diplomat and activist, conciliator and provocateur'.⁶

Most intimately connected with the settlement of disputes is the Secretary-General's role as a mediator, conducting preventive diplomacy and



A UN election supervisor in Haiti tries to calm a potential confrontation between police and the crowd.



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offering his Good Offices. In recent years, the Secretary-General, either directly or through special envoys, has been substantially involved in dispute settlement in Afghanistan, Cambodia, Central America, Cyprus, East Timor, Falkland Islands/Malvinas, Guyana-Venezuela, the hostage crisis in Lebanon, Iran-Iraq, Iraq-Kuwait, Libya, the Middle East, the Rainbow Warrior dispute between New Zealand and France, Somalia, Western Sahara and former Yugoslavia.⁷

As with peacekeeping, the Good Offices function of the Secretary-General is not mentioned in the Charter. This role as independent mediator reached its peak around the mid-1980s. In most, if not all, of the cases mentioned his presence has had a significant impact. Indeed, his three 'I's (integrity, independence and initiative) may be needed more now – when so many conflicts are internal – than ever before.

Handling conflicts and creating peace

Peace looks so simple. Peace is when nothing happens, when the children have gone to bed, when soldiers stop shooting, when the sun has set – or somebody rests in peace. But with the media increasingly focusing on war, news about peace breaking out somewhere has stopped being news. Thus, very few citizens around the world have any insights into what a peacekeeping operation is, how it works and what it is supposed to do and not be able to do. UN peacekeeping operations appear predominantly in the popular media only when there is a failure or when there are allegations of mismanagement.

But peace must also be seen as the absence of structural violence. Around 25 million people have been killed in wars since 1945, while millions of others are killed not by bullets, but die from lack of clean water, housing, health care, education, clothes and shelter.

Viewed this way, peacekeeping is a very difficult concept. Within this definition, UN peacekeeping is not peacekeeping but various types of conflict-management, mitigation and resolution which, if successful, can help peoples and societies to create and maintain peace.

Not peacekeeping but conflict-management

Traditionally, a UN peacekeeping operation has taken place when there was 'a peace to keep' or at least a cease-fire agreement. However, peacekeeping has, more often than not, been reduced to monitoring, observing and reporting.

Between 1945 and 1985 peacekeeping, in the majority of cases, seems to have been 'cease-fire keeping'. The recent transformation of peacekeeping into much more complex operations, together with the added ingredient of military enforcement, is something for which the UN is simply not equipped.

Prevention is better than cure

The world community knows that prevention is better than cure. However, in most cases, the international community lacks agreed procedures, institutions, skilled operators and training for conducting violence-preventive diplomacy. Rather than intervening in the early days of a conflict and thus seeking out a 'bigger peace for the buck', the UN has found itself embroiled in impossible missions in the wake of catastrophe. In all cases hostilities have preceded the setting up of a peacekeeping operation with the exception of the UN command in Macedonia, a part of the UN Protection Force in former Yugoslavia (UNPROFOR). Preventive deployment – which is much closer to peacekeeping in a literal sense – is virtually non-existent.

William Durch, who has made an impressive

comparative analysis of 20 peacekeeping operations, found that his analysis confirmed the following hypotheses:

- peacekeeping requires local consent, and consent derives from local perceptions of the impartiality and moral authority of the peacekeepers' sponsoring organization
- peacekeeping requires the support of the Great Powers and the US in particular
- peacekeeping requires a prior alteration in the local parties' basic objectives, from winning everything to salvaging something. A frequent corollary is combat exhaustion or battlefield stalemate.⁸

In these three points we also find all the contradictions of UN peacekeeping. Not all countries and constituencies subscribe to the notion of the UN's impartiality. As Durch states: 'US support has been particularly crucial for peacekeeping in the past. In 45 years of peacekeeping operations, all that have gone forward have had US support, while others that were still-born suffered a lack of such support.'

The fact that the Security Council is the *de facto* decision-maker on peacekeeping operations undermines the UN's neutrality in the eyes of a number of member states. Between 40 and 50 clear-cut international aggressions have taken place around the world since 1945. Only a few of them have been acted upon by the UN.

“peacekeeping requires the support of the Great Powers”

Enforcing the peace

The more that major actors fall back on what former Secretary-General Pérez de Cuéllar calls the 'disorder and injustice of power politics', the more likely it is that local consent will not be obtained. This ought to make the UN give up the idea of peace enforcement as part of peacekeeping operations.

Some observers find that Chapter 7 is the essential element of the UN Charter. For instance, Roberts and Kingsbury maintain that 'with the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, it (the UN) was at last in a position to act more or less as its founders had intended, taking a decisive role in many crises, including the Gulf in 1991'.

The whole spirit of the Charter, however, makes Chapter 6 the central one and Chapter 7 function only as a last resort. Article 42 is extremely clear. The Security Council may take military action if it considers that measures not involving the use of armed force up to and provided in Article 41 'would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate'. There is a clear sequential philosophy of conflict mitigation built into the Charter, which aims to limit the UN to conflict settlement – not punishment or power politics.

Peace enforcement is a contradiction in terms. If the UN has to employ force, against one participant in a conflict, it is likely to create increased resistance. This holds true for domestic conflicts in particular. Peace enforcement is, ultimately, an expression of power politics. It should be done only in accordance with Chapter 7, while recalling that the UN Charter states that the highest aim is to save 'succeeding generations from the scourge of war' and that 'armed force shall not be used, save in the common interest'.

Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali wrote a letter to the UN Security Council on 24 July 1994⁹ in which he outlined three options for UN peacekeeping in the former Yugoslavia. The letter is indicative of the turning point that the UN has arrived at on its 50th anniversary.

- **Option I** is that the UN be given enough resources and political support to enable it to carry through the new, much more compre-

hensive peacekeeping operations it has attempted in recent years. This he finds unrealistic, given the member states' policies and attitudes.

- **Option II** is to conduct these missions in close cooperation with NATO, as in the case of Bosnia. He concludes that this causes a number of problems in terms of control, coordination, contradictions – and scepticism on the part of the Russian Federation – and that it cannot be recommended as a model for the future.
- **Option III** is that the UN authorizes missions carried out by *ad hoc* groups of countries that can draw on the necessary resources and have the experience and infrastructure.

Boutros-Ghali argues that member states will provide neither the political commitment and legitimacy nor the financial resources or personnel to make the UN what it ought to be. But it is an intellectual and political cul-de-sac to recommend UN authorization of military interventions by one or a few Security Council members. Unavoidably, the world organization will become co-responsible for policies and actions – in fields and situations of extreme unpredictability – over which it will have no practical control.



The UN issued UN registration cards for the 1993 Cambodia elections. The crowd wave their cards on polling day.

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Therefore, when peace 'enforcement' is combined with a UN peacekeeping operation, it stands a fair chance of doing more harm than good. Who among those being bombed with UN authorization are likely to listen to the advice and mediation efforts of the Secretary-General or a UN peacekeeping force commander? In short, the UN, to survive,

must be seen as an organization that attempts to soften the worst consequences of the world's brutality and disorder. The UN must be careful not to become part of the power politics it is helping to remedy.

The Security Council contradiction

The Security Council members are responsible for well over 80 per cent of the world's arms exports and a somewhat smaller percentage of world military expenditures.¹⁰ There is hardly a conflict in which one or more of them has not been among the causal factors behind the outbreak of hostilities. There is a profound contradiction between member states being, on the one hand, actors with their own political interests and, on the other, neutral third party mediators.

The human dimension

Conflicts and wars are acted out by human beings. If truth is the first victim in wars, complex understanding is the second. What type of expertise does the UN usually rely on when dealing with a conflict? It seems to be predominantly diplomats and legal and human rights experts. It goes without saying that such expertise is vital but is it also sufficient? Politicians and diplomats often reduce the complexity of situations to such a level of simplicity that they fail to do justice to the full reality.

It is indicative of the general ignorance of conflict-resolution as both a science and an art that most mediators and negotiators say they find their own experience and education sufficient when facing such delicate situations.

In addition, when a peace agreement is signed, the victims of conflict have to learn to live with 'the other side'. Family A may find that Family B is moving in again next door, knowing that their own son has fought against the nation of B and was killed in the process. If a true peace is to survive it would be naive to believe that ordinary citizens can manage without community builders, social workers and psychologists. If we do not include the human dimension in the planning of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding, we are likely to see the traumas acted out at a later point.

Wars are fought according to political principles and a knowledge of tactics and strategy accumulated over centuries. The most sophisticated of all

technology is applied in warmaking. At least one-third of all the world's research and development is devoted to military affairs.

Nothing comparable exists in the struggle for conflict-resolution and peace. For example, there are fewer than 2,000 academically trained peace and conflict researchers worldwide. After 50 years, the international community is still trying to come to grips with such self-evident elements as early warning and comprehensive conflict analyses. The Secretary-General's *Agenda for Peace* is presented as innovative for its integrated approach towards conflict-prevention and peacebuilding.

It is tacitly assumed in current peacekeeping operations that a linear sequence of measures is used. First come preventive measures, then if war breaks out the UN turns its hand to peacekeeping, peacemaking and, finally, peacebuilding. The result of this approach is that if one of the steps turns out to be less than successful, the next will not take place. In fact, the three elements should work side by side. Peacebuilding can take place in the local community long before there is a signed agreement between national leaders. Indeed, serious local peacemaking efforts – 'peace from the ground up' – can serve as an important stimulus for peacemaking at higher levels.¹¹

“peace
from the
ground
up”

Looking to the future

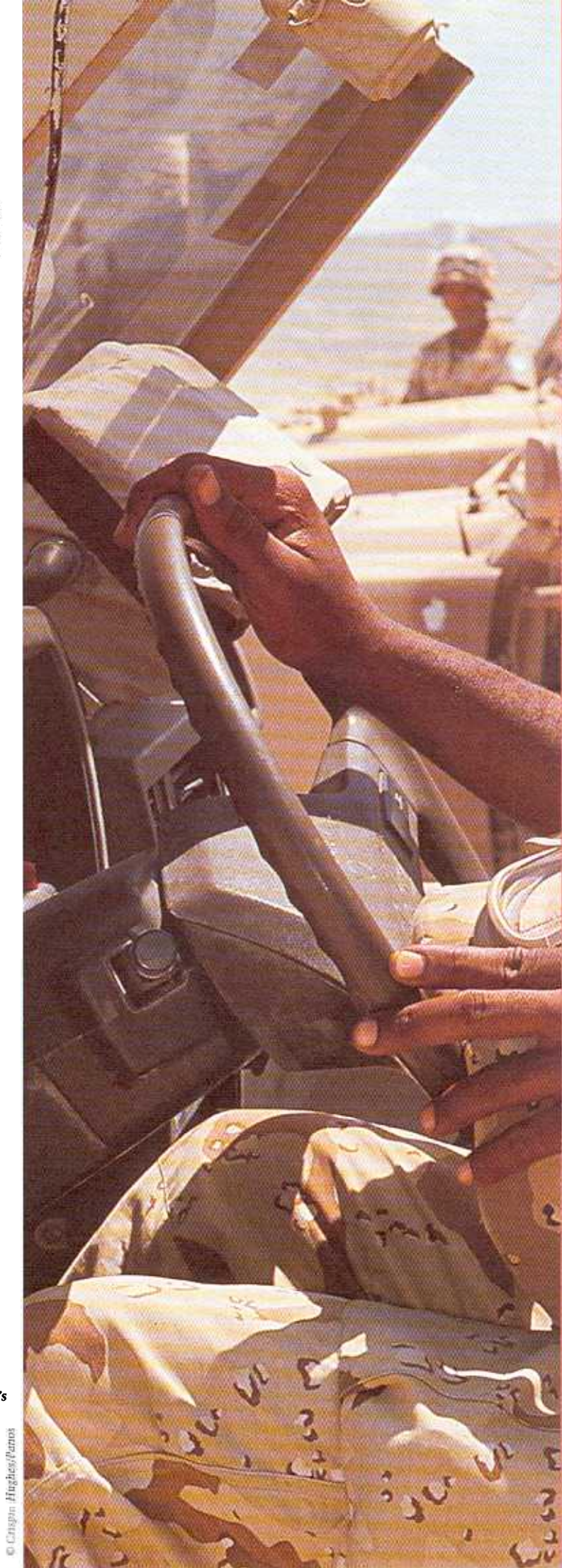
The weakness of the UN is a reflection of both the structures of the international system and of the individual UN member states. Since the mid-1980s member states have requested services from the UN to an extent which is totally out of proportion to what they are willing to contribute, and is more or less systematically undermined by the actions of some of the members themselves – particularly the five permanent Security Council members. Consequently the UN has failed, more or less, to stick to its mandate. As a consequence, there is a growing clamour for the UN to be given more 'teeth'. However, the solution may lie elsewhere.

First, what is needed is a serious commitment of member states to the principle of the UN Charter and a willingness to contribute the necessary financial resources, the qualified soldiers, officers, police and civil affairs and other staff.

In the words of the first UN Secretary-General, Trygve Lie, in 1946: 'The UN is no stronger than the collective will of the nations that support it. Of itself it can do nothing. It is a machinery through which the nations can cooperate. It can be used and developed ... or it can be discarded and broken.'

If the 185 member states would each make available, on average, 1,200 peacekeeping-trained blue helmets on a standby basis, there would be 221,000 blue helmets worldwide; 46,000 civil police would be available to the UN if each member state made available 250. If each member state would contribute only 600 civilians trained in all kinds of peacebuilding activities and local conflict-resolution, the UN would have at its disposal around 110,000 qualified peacebuilders. If all relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs) worldwide trained their own people for such tasks – doctors, human rights monitors, peace activists, journalists, psychologists, engineers, social workers, peace researchers, economists and community developers – many thousands more could be added.

UN peacekeepers guarding the airport in Somalia's capital, Mogadishu.





The resources needed for these contributions are small compared to the benefits they would make for the common good. They would cost only a fraction of the present 'warkeeping' expenditures. In the long run, these preventive measures would benefit the entire international community. They could reduce the growth in refugees and displaced people, spare cities from meaningless destruction and prevent potential economic growth from being retarded.

The second solution lies in reducing the arms trade. Thirdly, it lies in much better coordination of UN-related actors. Fourth, the solution lies in a more comprehensive philosophy and understanding about conflicts. The UN needs a strategy for functionally integrated peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding that takes into account the human dimension and the building of peace not only from the top down but also from local leaders and communities upwards. Also, the UN must make systematic use of the accumulated experiences, evaluations and proposals of the thousands who have served in peacekeeping missions.

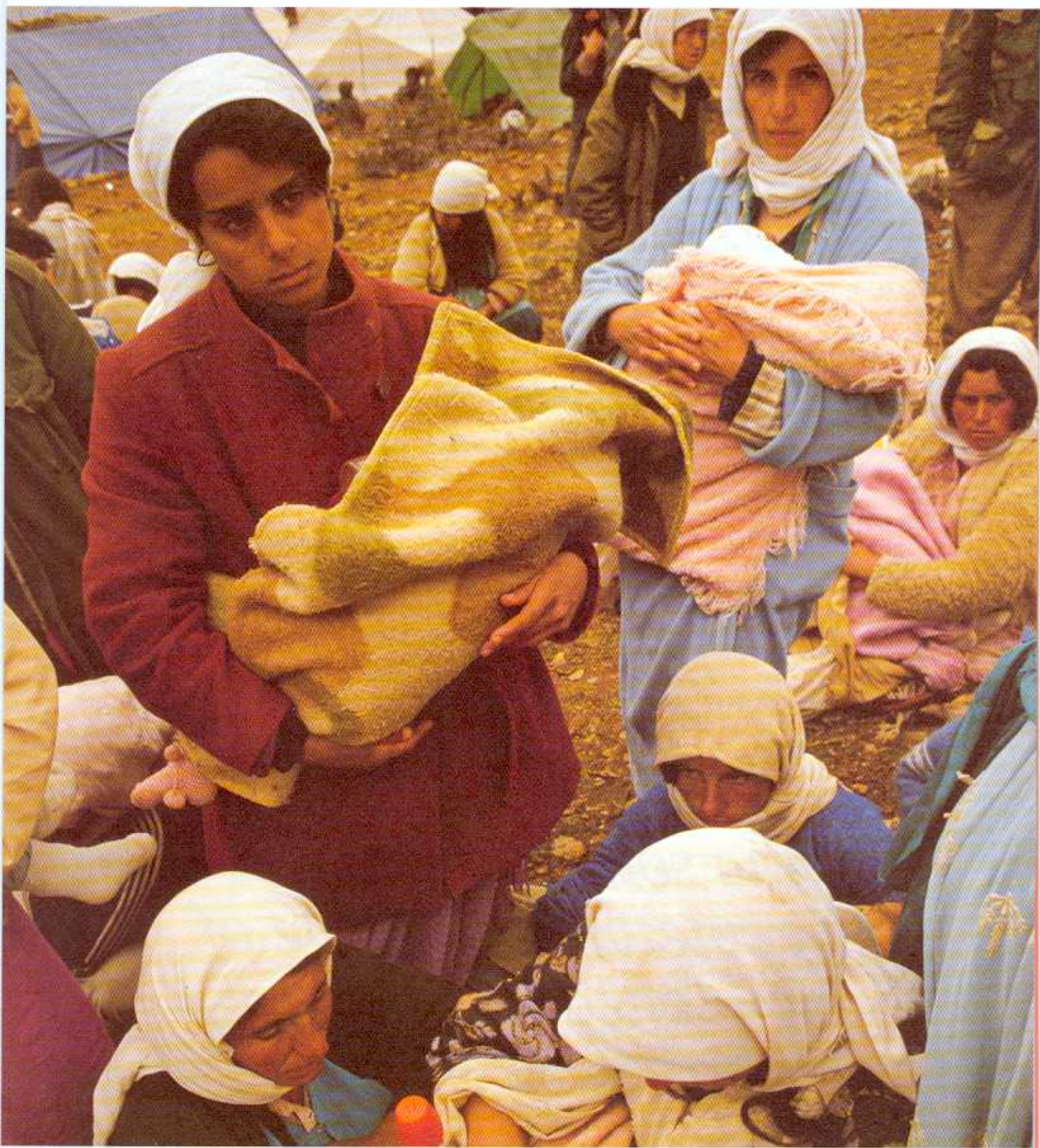
The solution also might lie in closer collaboration between the UN and NGOs working as 'white helmets' in all phases – conflict analysts, psychologists, social workers, human rights experts, community developers, economists, peace activists in general and women in particular – in short, all those who can do what the UN needs to do better or cannot do alone.

The UN is trapped in the structural contradictions of the international system. It cannot maintain impartiality – which is essential when trying to mediate. If government structures cannot be changed that quickly, the escape route may have to be the community of networks, NGOs, grassroots movements and individual expertise which are the seeds of an emerging transnational culture. Such a civilian capability for preventive diplomacy and peacebuilding is under way in the UN Volunteers programme (UNV) in cooperation with the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs (DHA) and other bodies.

The solution lies in reviewing the role of violence in human affairs. Violence is what we fall back on when nothing else works. Violence, unfortunately, is equated with statesmanship and leadership with power. However, in reality, violence is all too often a consequence of frustration, lack of foresight and powerlessness. The UN Charter is truly visionary in that it does emphasize a non-violent handling of conflicts.

The UN is not – and should not be – a military organization. It is not equipped for that. The UN is a world organization devoted, first and foremost, to settling disputes with a minimum of violence. If governments and politicians change their thinking and look to the common global good, they will discover that the Charter is a document of great potential.

“the solution lies in reviewing the role of violence in human affairs”



The UN's humanitarian efforts extend in crises to the protection of countless people driven from their homes by war.

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Endnotes

- 1 Figures from the UN Department of Public Information, May and July 1994.
- 2 UN Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 1994*, Oxford University Press 1994, pp.47-48.
- 3 See *United Nations: Divided World*, Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, Clarendon Press, London 1993.
- 4 Some suggestions are presented in *A United Nations of the Future - What 'We the Peoples' and Governments Can Do to Help the UN Help Ourselves*, The Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research (TFF), Lund 1991.
- 5 UN document A/49/527, *Human Resources Management: composition of the Secretariat*.
- 6 The expression is borrowed from *Basic Facts about the United Nations*, Department of Public Information, New York 1992.
- 7 For an excellent analysis of these cases, see Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, *The Role of the UN Secretary-General*, and Thomas M. Franck and Georg Nolte, *The Good Offices Function of the UN Secretary-General*, both in Roberts and Kingsbury, op. cit., pp.125-183.
- 8 William J. Durch, *The Evolution of UN Peacekeeping: Case Studies and Comparative Analysis*, MacMillan, London 1993.
- 9 Boutros Boutros-Ghali, UN document of 24 July 1994. The letter states that the UN ought to pull out of former Yugoslavia whether or not the parties accept the so-called Contact Group's 'peace plan'. His letter appeared the same week as the Bosnian Serbs were to decide on the Plan which, paradoxically enough, argues for a major role of the UN in protecting and administering Sarajevo, various corridors and towns.
- 10 See UNDP *Human Development Report 1994*, op. cit., p.55.
- 11 For an analysis of such possibilities in the case of Croatia, see Kerstin Schultz [1994] *Building Peace from the Ground Up - About People and the UN in a War Zone in Croatia*, The Transnational Foundation, Vegagatan 25, Lund, Sweden.