

Whither Peacekeeping?

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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Endnotes

1. Louis W. Goodman and Brian S. Mandell, *International Conflict Resolution for the 21st Century: Preparing Tomorrow's Leaders* (Washington, DC: Association of Professional School of International Affairs, August 1994).
2. I do *not*, however, mean to imply that all holistic peace research is postmodern or that all postmodernism is holistic peace research.
3. In the journal *Peace Review*, where these pieces were originally published, each article ends with a recommended reading list.

Whither Peacekeeping?

Jockel, Joseph T. *Canada and International Peacekeeping*. Toronto and Washington, DC: Canadian Institute of Strategic Studies and Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994.

Smith, Hugh, ed. *International Peacekeeping: Building on the Cambodian Experience*. Canberra: Australian Defence Studies Centre, 1994.

What are the lessons for peacekeeping which can be learned from the Cambodian experience? It should be noted at the outset that it was something of a misnomer to call the agreement signed in October 1991 to put an end to the Cambodian conflict a peace accord. In all the negotiations preceding the conclusion of the agreement, the different Cambodian factions involved in this conflict had not been able to concur on a power-sharing formula, and the international community was now attempting to launch with this diplomatic initiative a conflict resolution procedure based on a different strategy. According to the logic of the October 1991 document, a broad international peacekeeping force under the aegis of the United Nations would first, for all intents and purposes, take control of Cambodia and establish a "neutral political environment" so that "free and fair elections" could be organized in the country. The government brought to power through this process would then have to be recognized as legitimate by all the different Cambodian factions, and the endless discussions as to who among them represented the rightful power in Cambodia, which had hitherto paralyzed the peace process, would end at that point. The Cambodian factions were thus essentially agreeing to suspend their conflict while the United Nations created a democratic political environment in Cambodia and to then relocate it within these parameters. They had not resolved the contest which had divided them for years; they had simply accepted to move it from the battleground to the electoral arena.

Peace thus was understood in this perspective as the transformation of a violent conflict into a non-violent one. This was to be accomplished as the United Nations instituted what would amount to a new social contract in Cambodia; one

which would rest on the installation in that country of a series of democratic institutions and processes. The goal was ambitious, and the means put at its disposal, unprecedented. The international community committed enormous resources to what promised to be the largest peacekeeping operation ever mounted, if not with regards to the number of troops and the sums of money devoted to it, at least in terms of its objectives: for the first time, a United Nations peace operation would be charged with taking control of a state and reconfiguring its different components in order to establish a democratic climate within its borders.

It stood to reason, however, that three major predicaments would emerge. First, the United Nations personnel were bound to be confronted with major obstacles in their effort to transform Cambodia's socio-political landscape. Changes which had taken centuries to occur in other contexts were expected to happen in eighteen months here. Furthermore, the particular nature of Cambodia's political institutions, the lack of anything resembling a centralized state structure and the attendant fragmentation of the administrative apparatus according to factional and sub-factional lines, were bound to offer sufficient inertia to thwart the efforts of the United Nations. Second, the leadership of the different Cambodian factions could be expected to resist the societal transformations on which the logic of the October 1991 agreement was based. Their power had always rested on factional alignments anchored in a framework of traditional norms and arrangements, and the notion that this conception of power would be pushed aside by the United Nations in order to make way for a political order rooted in representational mechanisms could only be extremely threatening to them. Third, the very logic of the peace plan set in motion in October 1991 would undoubtedly be undermined by these obstacles. In all likelihood, for example, the idea that peace in Cambodia could only follow from the development of democracy in that country would hardly remain plausible in a context where the implementation of the different elements on the United Nations' mission dealing with the democratization of Cambodian society met with little success.

The subsequent evolution of the peace process did indeed prove these suppositions right. The United Nations personnel were never able to replace the traditional dynamics of factional politics in Cambodia with a more democratic political *praxis*. The leadership of the different factions also refused to comply with the October 1991 plan. The Khmer Rouge disassociated itself completely from the process while the other major faction, the group put in power by the Vietnamese in 1979, also resisted the presence of the United Nations, though on a more clandestine level.

Finally, a *constat d'échec* of the approach pursued by the United Nations in Cambodia was made when the promoters of the October 1991 peace agreement considered at great length an alternative conflict resolution procedure, structured around a plebiscite which would have given power to Prince Sihanouk. In the face of the inability of the United Nations to reach its original objectives, the prince would have formed a government of national reconciliation, based on some form of

inter-factional arrangement rather than on the democratic expression of the popular will. That such a plan was an admission of defeat for the proponents of what could be termed "the peace through democracy thesis" is underscored by the fact that the Khmer Rouge would have been included in this government, even though they had refused to participate in the electoral process organized by the United Nations.

In the end, Sihanouk's formula was not adopted. The discussions weighing its value made clear, however, that the creation of the "neutral political environment," considered in October 1991 as the prerequisite to truly democratic elections had not taken place, and that the electoral process organized by the United Nations therefore had lost its pertinence since it would most probably usher in a government based on an inter-factional compact rather than on a concern with the popular will. Holding the elections in this context thus simply constituted a face-saving device allowing the United Nations, as a journalist friend put it to me at the time, "to declare peace and get out of Cambodia as fast as possible."

It is essential to understand the factors underlying this failure to implement the conflict resolution mechanism envisaged by the signatories of the October 1991 agreement. The Cambodian operation constituted a patent illustration of the expansion of the peacekeeping vocabulary linked to the redefinition of the United Nations' role in the emerging post-Cold War order. The order of magnitude of peacekeeping operations under way or recently completed is indeed much different from that of previous ones: peacekeeping operations under United Nations auspices now frequently aim at creating the conditions necessary to the lasting resolution of seemingly intractable conflicts, rather than undertaking to diminish their intensity as happened more often than not in the past. And, just as was the case in Cambodia, these operations follow from the logic that it is through the creation of a complex of institutions similar to those found in liberal democracies that this movement away from never-ending violent conflicts can be achieved. The lessons learned in Cambodia thus will reverberate in many other settings.

Most preeminently, the Cambodian experience demonstrates that the United Nations must know more about the encounter between the Western-style institutions promoted in these expanded peacekeeping operations and the socio-political milieu in which they are to take root. In a word, what should be the exact nature of the involvement of the United Nations in "failed states," to use an expression which has now entered the political lexicon?¹ How can expanded peacekeeping operations move these states away from intractable internecine violence if the socio-political framework which they advocate as an alternative has little resonance in that particular context? How should the resistance of the traditional leaders threatened by this effort to transcend the type of political practices from which they derive their power be integrated in the logic of the involvement of the United Nations? What should be the role of force there? Finally, and perhaps most importantly, how is it possible to formulate a peacekeeping doctrine whose objectives remain coherent even as its implementation is hindered by these types of obstacles?

It is because it fails to address adequately these fundamental issues that *International Peacekeeping: Building on the Cambodian Experience*, edited by Hugh Smith of the University College, University of New South Wales, is in the last analysis somewhat disappointing. This book is a compendium of the texts presented at a seminar held in May 1994 to examine the Cambodian operation and its implications for the future evolution of peacekeeping. The seminar brought together a wide array of participants, mostly Australian. The book itself is divided in three parts of unequal length. Its two principal sections deal with "The Cambodian Experience" and "United Nations Perspectives," while a shorter section considers what is termed "Australian and Regional Perspectives."

The two most captivating texts in this book are those of Lieutenant General John Sanderson, who obviously speaks from experience since he was Commander of the military component of the United Nations mission in Cambodia, and of Hugh Smith, who endeavors in his "Prospects for Peacekeeping" to summarize the contributions he edited and to address in a more systematic fashion the issues which they raise. Sanderson gives a fascinating overview of the United Nations mandate in Cambodia and raises important points. In particular, his views on what he calls "civil-military relations" are worth pondering. He notes that

humanitarian and peacekeeping objectives are not in opposition, but rather they are different instruments of the same purpose. The humanitarian effort must itself be the subject of properly constructed plans which themselves form part of an overall integrated plan working towards a common objective. (p. 23)

The remark is important in the context of the close links between the military and NGOs which is entailed by the movement of peacekeeping operations towards broader objectives of societal reorganization. Sanderson is also interesting in his comments on the criteria which should guide the selection of national contingents for peacekeeping missions.

For his part, Hugh Smith presents a quite sophisticated account of the changes witnessed in recent years in the area of peacekeeping and of the tensions which these changes have generated. He claims that these tensions need to be resolved in three principal ways. First, he argues for the "development of peacekeeping operations," which requires, in his mind, the unfolding of a "professional military approach" and of "more effective political-military relations." (pp.207-8) He also calls for a "reform of the United Nations," which would involve a "strong emphasis" on preventive diplomacy, an "overhauling" of the method of funding peacekeeping, and a "strengthening of the role of regional organizations." (pp. 209-10) Finally, he invites a "clarification of political objectives" at the level of United Nations involvement in "internal conflict and disorder," at the level of the "need to administer countries that for one reason or another lack an effective government," and at that of the "constitutional position [of the organization] with regard to the principle of sovereignty." (pp. 210-11)

A recurrent weakness of the book, however, is that it too often portrays the United Nations operation in Cambodia as more of a success than it really was. Few of the authors present here, it is true, go as far as Robert Ray, Australia's Minister for Defence, who claims brazenly that

the conduct and planning of UN operations in Cambodia were exemplary. This task was made easier by the spirit of cooperation which the Paris Agreement imposed on all parties, as well as by the ability of the UN Command in Cambodia to clearly define the role of the peacekeepers in relation to the agreed procedures that had to be undertaken to support the peace process. (p. 101)

This sentiment that the Cambodian experience was an overall victory for the United Nations pervades the book. Those of us who were in Cambodia when the electoral process set in motion by the October 1991 agreement neared its end know that this is not the case. The United Nations completely failed to establish the "neutral political environment" which was seen as the condition *sine qua non* of a truly democratic vote that could, in turn, bring peace to the country. The Cambodians did go to the polls in great numbers, but they did so because they were courageous enough to confront a very real danger of political violence, not at all because the peacekeeping forces charged with implementing the October 1991 agreement had managed to fulfill its most basic provision.

If the United Nations then argued that having these elections demonstrated the success of its action in Cambodia, it is because the organization had reformulated its original objectives in order to fit a situation over which it had lost all measure of control. A common thread running through many of the texts included here is that they either endorse this revisionism by subscribing to it themselves or contend that the elections at least represented a first step in the democratization, and thus the pacification, of Cambodia. This also does not correspond to the reality of the subsequent evolution of the country: almost two years later, the situation in Cambodia is marked by the type of factional infighting and latent violence which has always characterized Cambodian politics much more than by any movement toward democracy and peace.

Because the authors regrouped in this book do not study the obstacles which kept the United Nations from recasting the fragmented and violent order of traditional Cambodian politics into a more democratic political framework more amenable to non-violent political interaction, and indeed because they even refuse to acknowledge the existence of this problem, their recommendations essentially pertain to the technical failings of the operation in Cambodia. They see the intervention of the United Nations as a success and they are thus content to address what they perceive to be minor shortcomings in its implementation. Some interesting points concerning possible reforms of the United Nations peacekeeping machinery or the financing of peacekeeping operations are in fact advanced in this context, but they do not include any insights that have not been already presented in a multitude of other texts.

However, the issue of the difficulties entailed by the very nature of the United Nations' involvement in Cambodia is never taken up in these recommendations. Some of the arguments put forward here can indeed be seen as contributing to a further understanding of this question. Hugh Smith's invitation to the United Nations to refine its thinking on the need to put in place some form of administrative apparatus in societies where state structures are eroding is certainly valid, given, for example, the resistance to international administration witnessed in Cambodia. Since these arguments are not presented in a analytical framework which could highlight the full extent of their implications, however, their exploration remains sparse. This is, once again, the main weakness of the book.

A counterpoint to this problem is provided in *Canada and International Peacekeeping*, a booklet of approximately eighty pages by Joseph T. Jockel of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC, on the probable involvement of the "peacekeeping country *par excellence*" (p. 1) in future United Nation peace operations. Jockel begins his book by outlining the changes which have marked the recent movement of peacekeeping operations toward broad and multi-faceted processes articulated around both military and civilian components and intended to put an end to long-standing internal conflicts. Against this background, he introduces four questions: "Why has peacekeeping become so important to Canada, and will it remain important? What military resources does the Canadian government possess for peacekeeping? What is the priority of peacekeeping in Canadian defense policy? What options for peacekeeping does the [Canadian] government have?" (p. 10) A short chapter of about ten pages is then devoted to each of these issues.

The chapter on the importance of peacekeeping to Canadians describes the different factors which have shaped Canada's dedication to the idea and the practice of peacekeeping and those which today call into question this commitment. The fact that Canada could in the past capitalize on peacekeeping operations to give shape to a distinctive identity on the international stage and that this is now proving to be difficult in light of the great number of countries which are becoming involved in such operations is, for instance, introduced in this context. The chapter on the military resources at the disposal of the Canadian government to conduct peacekeeping operations deals with the likely evolution of Canadian forces in the "era of fiscal restraint." (p. 27) The chapter on the place of peacekeeping in the larger context of Canadian defense policy, for its part, revolves around an analysis of the different themes which underlay the recent defense review in Canada.

Once all these parameters are in place, Jockel introduces in the last and certainly most polemic chapter of his book: the options which these parameters leave open to the Canadian government with regard to its peacekeeping policies and those which, in his opinion, it should favor. According to him, a "new, distinctive Canadian approach to peacekeeping could entail three elements." (p. 65) The first of these elements is the "vanguard concept, whereby at the start of a peacekeeping

operation Canadians would contribute units with a valuable, specialized military skill such as communications, ground or air transportation, engineering resources, or medical services." (p. 65) The second element is "an emphasis within Canada, and with support from the government, on peacekeeping research and training." (p. 65) The third element, finally, is the "broadening of Canadian peacekeeping beyond its traditional military base" (p. 66) to allow for a more integrated military-civilian nexus.

The principal weakness of Jockel's analysis parallels the one which undermines the book edited by Hugh Smith. His study does not incorporate a satisfactory account of the type of political and societal resistance which is prompting a reassessment of expanded peacekeeping operations and this shortcoming, in turn, subtracts from the value of its recommendations. Jockel is correct, if perhaps too concise, in his assessment of the principal dynamics which are going to shape the peacekeeping policy of the Canadian government in the next few years. But this is only one side of the equation: by overlooking the fundamental implications for the evolution of peacekeeping, of the difficulties encountered by many expanded peacekeeping operations, Jockel fails to really bring into relief the type of operation in which Canada will be asked to participate and, consequently, the precise nature of what could constitute its optimal contribution in these circumstances.

The overall impression which emanates from these two books is thus twofold. First, the specific features of the political and societal obstacles which have hindered the implementation of numerous expanded peacekeeping operations must be delineated and analyzed. What is at stake here is nothing less than the present commitment to these operations: if the problems behind the failure of many of these operations are not brought to light and the means of resolving them not found, the international community could distance itself from undertakings which it would consider bound to flounder. Second, this sort of study must be integrated into the analysis which serves as the foundation for the recommendations on the evolution of peacekeeping operations and on national policies regarding peacekeeping, and which is now being put forward in the scholarly literature. It is only if this is done that these recommendations will be relevant to the situation at hand.

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Endnotes

1. On this notion, see Gerald B. Helman and Steven R. Ratner, "Saving Failed States," *Foreign Policy*, no. 89 (Winter 1992-93), pp. 3-20.