

"THE MILITARY'S ROLE IN COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES"

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SEVERAL MARKERS CONCERNING THE ROLE OF THE MILITARY IN COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN EMERGENCIES

The following markers should be considered, both in analyzing and prescribing roles for armed forces in today's saturated environment of complex emergencies (natural and man-made -- often in combination).

1. There are few success stories to guide us on appropriate and effective use of armed force capabilities in complex emergencies.

2. The current pattern of last-minute, often desperate resort to military forces to salvage humanitarian operations could be said to have begun with a near disaster for the reputation of the military. This was the failure to include a humanitarian annex for the Desert Storm operations plan in the Gulf War. The hastily picked-up rescue operation for Kurds in Northern Iraq was a near-run thing, but in many ways has set a pattern for future use of the military in complex emergencies.

3. There is no stand-alone military role in complex emergencies. Employment of military assets is feasible only as part of a comprehensive strategy and action involving a triad of humanitarian, political, and security components.

4. Use of the military tool in the operational mode for complex emergencies is costly and generally sub-optimal; the paramount strategy for complex emergencies must be the use of all possible efforts to prevent such emergencies. Prevention first and foremost averts and reduces human cost. It also averts or reduces high overhead costs associated with the military. Military roles must emphasize the value of holding out the operational military option for purposes of deterrence, prevention, and behavioral modification.

5. Apart from the current negative domestic climate crippling defects in US, and in United Nations, organization, procedures, and culture virtually rule out rational and effective integration of the military component of the triad in humanitarian operations.

6. Structure, process, and even culture in both the US Government and in the UN must be reinvented as a result of the above defects. Reinvented -- because both the US and the UN demonstrated the necessary qualities for success in two major UN success stories in past complex emergencies -- Sir Robert Jackson's Thai/Cambodia border relief operation in the early Eighties, and the Brad Morse/Maurice Strong Organization for Emergency Operations in Africa in the mid-Eighties. Such a reinvention is especially painful and problematical now, however, due to domestic anxieties over ANY military role, but particularly humanitarian roles under UN auspices; also, unnecessary differences with admittedly difficult allies, whose help we need in a coalition effort to reinvent the UN triad, now seriously threaten the success of this effort.

DISCUSSION

These markers are not intended to provide the material for a manual on military doctrine and tactics in humanitarian operations (DOD is already working on such a manual, with interagency input). Serious attention to these markers, however, could help us avoid further pitfalls in such arguably ill-advised applications of military force as were and are now occurring with respect to Somalia and Haiti. Most important, these markers can help instruct us on how to develop structural, procedural, and cultural frameworks in the US, and in the UN, which could facilitate intelligent and comprehensive use of the humanitarian/political/security triad.

WHAT THE MARKERS MEAN

1. Lack of Success Stories.

It is not entirely by accident that neither of the two finest hours of UN humanitarian performance -- Sir Robert Jackson's UN Border Relief Operation for Thailand/Cambodia in the early Eighties, and the Organization for Emergency Operations in Africa in the mid-Eighties -- relied on a military component. In those cases, the proper role for indigenous military forces was to stay out of the way and do no harm. Extraordinarily strong civilian leadership of the humanitarian and political triad components helped preclude need for positive military contributions. Today's Road to Sarajevo led to the tar pits because civilian political leadership -- in the US and in Western Europe -- failed. The lesson is that civilian toughness and discipline tried early enough could avert the resort to military toughness and discipline tried too late.

Lack of instructive precedents also means that we must write the book on the use of military capabilities in the post-Cold War environment of simultaneous, complex emergencies.

2. Current Pattern of Resort to the Military Rooted in the Gulf War Aftermath.

What appeared to be a brilliant military operation was soured by US ineptitude in dealing with an immediate and predictable humanitarian aftermath of the Gulf War -- the vulnerability of Kurds and Shiites in Northern and Southern Iraq respectively. Operations Plan Desert Storm lacked a humanitarian annex because: the military, had they thought of it, would have ruled it outside their scope of responsibility; and second, civilian leaders who should have foreseen and insisted upon a humanitarian component to Desert Storm, did not, and do not, know how to strategize and plan comprehensively for such complex emergencies. However, the military catch-up plan, which the British shamed us into, came to look a lot like a winner, and ironically seems to have set the pattern for today's all too ready resort to exercising the military option, as opposed to a more appropriate civilian option, for humanitarian action.

3. The Military Role Must not be Free-standing, but Rather Part of the Humanitarian/Political/Security Triad.

There was a haunting sleep-walk on the Road to Sarajevo which drifted past a do-nothing paralysis in Europe, propped up by a do-nothing paralysis in the US, by default leading to a do-little intervention by the US -- and then drifting to an inevitable call for a do-something military role to attempt a salvage operation.

Had there been a coordinated triad approach, a forceful preventive effort, including an intelligent behavioral modification role (for Serb behavior) for military forces, the outcome could have been quite different. This preventive effort should have included calls two years ago for war crimes trials for state criminals, especially Serbs, rather than the pitifully late US call in Geneva in December 1992. Military measures, tried early enough, could have supported this preventive, mitigative effort. For example, since the Serbs only respond to force, NEVER state, as the allies did, that you will not use it. Make maximum use of smart weapons and no-fly zones BEFORE peacekeepers arrive and become hostages. NEVER permit an arms embargo that disproportionately cripples a key and most vulnerable party to the conflict.

4. Prevention of future complex emergencies must be the centerpiece of US and UN strategy.

Several of the 17 on-going complex emergencies are reaching holocaust-like proportions in terms of human cost. And countries increasingly lack the will, and the means, to meet the financial costs. To the extent that prevention uses military capacities in a deterrent, mitigative and behavioral modification support role, rather than an operational support role, financial costs are also reduced. The military's overhead is disproportionately high compared to more appropriate civilian relief instruments. An example of constructive behavioral modification inspired by military force was Sudan's Prime Minister Bashir's sudden behavioral change with respect to permitting food convoys to Southern Sudan when he saw the allied military intervention in Northern Iraq (soon reverting to type when he soon saw he had nothing to fear in Sudan). An example of negative behavioral change occurred with the unintelligent military mission of trying to capture War Lord Aideed in Somalia.

5. Defective US, and UN, Capacities for use of the Triad
-- You Can't Get There From Here.

Never have the Washington Redskins, and the US Government, seemed to have so much in common. The difference is that we know what is missing in the US Government. What is missing is leadership and literacy in exercising the interagency process to elicit maximum performance out of the entire US triad for complex emergencies. This leadership/literacy vacuum did not begin with the current administration, but extended well back in the Bush administration -- hence the slippery slopes to Somalia, Liberia, and Bosnia. But literacy and leadership in organizing the US, and, in turn, the UN, haven't improved under Clinton, and in many ways have deteriorated. I don't see any hint of leadership at senior levels in the State Department or in Defense, for improving US performance in complex emergencies, or in reforming the UN so the US doesn't need to shoulder all the responsibilities alone. By default, what leadership exists seems to reside in an unlikely source -- AID. In the current PRD-13 interagency exercise on peacekeeping, it was AID, with help from the NSC that blew the whistle on the Defense Department and insisted that the humanitarian component be fully factored into the interagency paper -- since the main effort in most of today's complex emergencies is humanitarian, with political and peacekeeping elements in a supporting role.

6. The Need for a Serious Reinvention of the US Government
-- and of the United Nations -- to Deal With Complex
Emergencies.

I say RE-INVENT, because the US Government proved it could pull up its own interagency socks, and it could provide leadership to mobilize the UN, for the horrendous African drought of 1984-85, and again for the recent drought in Southern Africa. It is not well known, but true, that it was US leadership, almost alone, that was responsible for the UN's achieving its finest hour in directing the response and recovery for the '84-'85 African disaster.

But personnel have changed at State and Defense; from the mid-Eighties onward there has been a palpably less supportive environment for middle-level leaders in the humanitarian field to drag their superiors along with them and bring great credit to the US, and to the UN, for humanitarian achievements. There is also proportionately less money, and far less political fortitude to deal with the post-Cost War humanitarian overload.

Three recent events give us reason for hope, however

- The US interagency effort for the recent UN humanitarian reform action in the United Nations Economic and Social Council (June 1993 in Geneva), composed of middle level officers in State and AID, demonstrated extraordinary teamwork and effectiveness in formulating and advocating US positions in the multilateral arena. The focus of reform was greater effectiveness of the UN humanitarian/political/security triad. Literacy and excellence in multilateralism are alive and well among some of State and AID's most talented middle level officers. Their superiors would do well to try to catch up with them.

- As previously noted, leadership in AID's Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, supported by the NSC, stopped DOD's runaway with the PRD-13 peacekeeping exercise, and made the point that humanitarian objectives are generally the main effort in complex emergencies, while political AND military capacities are there to support.

- And the NSC designated on September 15 of this year, the AID Administrator as the interagency humanitarian Czar for the USG, with the title of Special Coordinator for International Disaster Assistance. This is the permanent, coordinating US leadership post designed to achieve more effective US, and UN, performance which has been so tragically missing for years. The Special Coordinator will do his duty, however, only to the extent that HE is able to envisage it and assert it, and to the extent that his central coordinating authority and accountability are supported by the NSC and the Secretary of State. A principal challenge for the Special Coordinator will

be the creation of an interagency culture and practice of comprehensive planning and coordinated action -- involving each part of the triad, but especially, the military. While he, of course, may not command the military, he must show them their interest in tucking in close alongside him in each phase of a complex emergency's life-cycle.