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Understanding the Role of Casualties in U.S. Peace Operations

by

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Introduction

The United States entered the 1990s on a roll, victoriously emerging from the Cold War as the globe's single remaining superpower. Less than fourteen months into the decade, America led the allies to a decisive victory in the Persian Gulf War, demonstrating competence and confidence in its new role. Vetoes of multilateral initiatives by permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, commonplace during the Cold War, became rare.¹ Once-adversarial Council members, such as China and Russia, responded favorably to U.S. leadership while engaging with America economically. Also, early in the decade, the reputation of the United Nations improved following peacekeeping successes in Namibia, Cambodia and El Salvador. With U.S. leadership and a cooperative Security Council, there appeared no limit to what could be achieved — in the interest of peace — as the world closed out the bloodiest century in its history.

Multilateral peace operations became more feasible, in the absence of bipolar superpower stalemate, but regrettably, the United States did not have sufficient time to develop a peace operations doctrine before it was compelled into action.² Intrastate conflicts — resulting from the fall of communism and other dynamics — quickly overloaded the United Nations, defaulting the problem to the United States. For example, the situation with the Kurdish minority in Northern Iraq evolved immediately as a sequel to the Gulf War. Obligations inherited from the 1980s already tied up a U.S. combat battalion in the Sinai. It quickly became apparent that the United States was in the peace operations business in the 1990s — policy or no policy.

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Without a firm policy framework to provide guidelines for disciplined planning, U.S. military peace operations increased to an unprecedented level in the first half of the decade. By the end of 1995, six major peace operations had been undertaken, increasing missions 300 percent for the Army and 400 percent for the Air Force.³ During the Cold War, the United States had participated in UN peacekeeping efforts by providing small numbers of observers and monitors as part of a larger UN presence, but never large combat units. In non-UN sponsored peace operations, only one large unit — an infantry battalion — was committed in the Sinai as part of the Multinational Force and Observers (MFO), and the relative impact on the large Cold War military was minimal.

Civilian and uniformed defense leaders were willing participants during this period of increased demands for peace operations in the early 1990s. In the absence of a finite peace operations doctrine, there was virtually no basis for saying “no” and being able to substantiate their objections to those outside the Pentagon. With the Cold War military machine still largely intact from the Gulf War, no threatening Warsaw Pact, and Saddam Hussein firmly confined within his own borders, there were few competing priorities to justify foot-dragging by the Department of Defense. Sufficient forces were in place to counter threats in such places as Korea, and the United States could forecast no military peer or near-peer for the next fifteen to twenty years.

There were other reasons that the Department of Defense supported increased involvement in peace operations. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, military leaders had been looking for new opportunities to define the role of the armed forces and adapt to the post-Cold War Era. Ivan Eland from the Cato Institute stated: “They don’t really like to do peacekeeping, but they know from an organizational point of view they have to do it to prove their relevance.”⁴ The need to prove relevance should not have been necessary, given the continuing need to protect America’s global interests, but the concern among the Pentagon leadership was well founded. In the American tradition, a large drawdown in personnel and equipment follows major victory, despite prophetic predictions and disastrous results when new threats emerge down the road. The Cold War was being hailed as such a major victory and Americans wanted their “peace dividend.”

The arrival of the Clinton administration and its expanded national security strategy focusing on “engagement and enlargement” broadened the military’s role in nontraditional missions and increased its relevance in areas other than warfighting.⁵ Although Operation Provide Comfort in Northern Iraq, Operation Restore Hope in Somalia and the MFO were all initiatives of the Bush administration, the engagement aspect of the new strategy increased the viability of peace operations as a means to help shape the international security environment. Peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations allowed the armed forces, in the early stages of conflict, a potential opportunity to influence a situation, preempting an escalation of conflict later. Also, the possibility of preserving some units from the impending force structure cuts was not lost on military leaders, as the same forces that are used to perform peace operations are also used for the primary military mission: fighting and winning wars. Embracing peace operations was initially viewed by defense advocates as both an opportunity to preempt and prevent conflict and a way to preserve warfighting capability and maintain combat readiness. John Hillen of the Council of Foreign Relations believes that peace operations “may be the key to keeping an Army that has a robust end strength and big budget.”⁶

After almost a decade of experiential learning and evolving policy, America is now beginning to come to grips with the limits of peace operations. What was viewed initially by America’s leaders principally as a positive opportunity to shape a better world and maintain relevance in the post-Cold War era, is now being viewed more comprehensively: in terms of its costs and restrictions, in addition to its opportunities. The greatest limitation to date, and the one that has the greatest impact

on peace operations policy, has been the intolerance of the American public to sustain casualties for peacekeeping or peace enforcement missions. My aim in this paper is to outline and discuss the impact of casualties on the peace operations policy that was developed in the 1990s and will take us into the 21st century.

Casualties

To date the greatest limitation on military peace operations has been the reluctance and intolerance of the American people to accept combat casualties on missions underwritten in the name of peace. In the public's psyche, wars, not peace missions, warrant the risk of human losses due to hostile fire. In both cases, the sensitivity of the American public to casualties is high; however, each elicits completely different responses and yields different pain thresholds. In war — declared and undeclared — the public reaction to high casualties has traditionally been to expedite the intensity of the conflict, “wrap it up” and achieve a quick victory. In peace operations, where the trigger for the pain threshold is much lower, the reaction is instead to terminate U.S. involvement, as was the case in Somalia. Both pain thresholds are further influenced by a general modern expectation that technology and overwhelming force make “real war” less expensive, from a human standpoint. This concept of “cheap warfare,” when translated to peace operations, yields a tolerance standard that is close to zero. This near-zero tolerance limitation has shaped our formal policies. Moreover, it is reinforced in public opinion and influences the way military commanders approach their peace missions.

America and Casualties. There is a popular perception — at home and abroad — that America has no tolerance for casualties and that when public opinion erodes as a result of high casualties, the United States will withdraw from any conflict short of declared war. However, history is replete with examples of cases where high casualties in U.S. wars led to negative public opinion, yet the fighting continued for years. For example, in the Civil War, the Battle of Antietam claimed 23,000 casualties in one day, yet the war raged on for three more years. Korea and Vietnam, commonly perceived as wars that were stopped by public opinion, claimed over 348,000 casualties, including 81,000 deaths spanning three consecutive decades. A RAND study addresses this paradox with respect to Vietnam and Korea:

A detailed analysis of polls taken during both wars shows that as the conflicts continued and casualties and costs . . . mounted, public opinion did indeed become disillusioned with America's involvement, with more and more Americans regretting the original decision to intervene.

There was, however, very little movement in the percentage of Americans polled who wished the United States to withdraw from the conflict. In fact, a growing number of Americans favored escalation of the conflicts to bring them back to a quick — and victorious — end.⁷

Escalation to win appears to be the American experience when faced with the dilemma of mounting casualties in the case of wars and most armed regional conflicts. Polls for Korea and Vietnam showed “an inverse relationship between ‘approval’ of the intervention and the public's desire to escalate to achieve the decisive results.”⁸ For Korea, in April 1952, 49 percent of people polled wanted to attack the Communist Chinese while only 16 percent favored bringing the troops home. There was even at one point a 47 percent approval rating to “attack the Communist forces with everything we have.”⁹ Throughout the war, 77 percent of those polled opted not to withdraw and “those favoring escalation always greatly outnumbered those favoring withdrawal — from a margin of two to one at the beginning of the conflict to almost five to one for the period after July 1951.”¹⁰

Vietnam, the RAND report states, was even a more compelling example of public support for escalation as conflicts continue. As in Korea, public support fell as casualties mounted while support for escalation went up, presumably to complete the mission and get the troops home victoriously. From 1965 to 1968, 77 percent of the people polled in the RAND study favored remaining in Vietnam versus 12 percent favoring withdrawal.

By November 1967, those favoring escalation exceeded those favoring fighting at the same level of effort by nearly five to two, and those favoring escalation exceeded those favoring withdrawal by nearly five to one. 'Approval' of the war was inversely related to the desire to escalate the conflict.¹¹

The Persian Gulf War provides a contemporary example that is consistent with the aforementioned desire of the public to gain victory and "not quit," despite the fear of high U.S. casualties. Although initial public support to "drive the Iraqis out of Kuwait" yielded only 37 percent to 52 percent approval ratings in Gallup polls in the six weeks leading up to the Senate vote on Iraq, support rose to 83 percent once the war started. This support existed despite the fact that 83 percent believed that "high numbers of casualties would result on both sides" and that "Iraq will use chemical, biological, or nuclear weapons (82 percent)." More surprisingly, 67 percent of the public wanted to exceed the UN mandate, not stop once the stated objectives were met; "they wanted America to press on until Saddam was removed from power." Clearly, America wanted a "decisive victory," and the casualty issue was subordinate to this overarching goal.¹²

Despite occurring in the single-superpower era and before the same post-Cold War audience as that of Operation Desert Storm, the same level of success could not be achieved in Somalia — less than three years later. Clearly, Somalia demonstrated that peace operations are not viewed in the same context by the same American public that reacted positively to the use of force in the Gulf. In fact, the reaction to peace operations more resembles another category of military operations where the populace has shown a low tolerance to accept casualties:

Prolonged interventions in complex political situations in failed states characterized by civil conflict, in which U.S. interests and principles are typically much less compelling, or clear, and in which success is often elusive at best. Past examples of this type include interventions in the Dominican Republic (1965) and Lebanon (1982-1984).¹³

Eric V. Larsen argues that the relative importance of the casualty issue can be linked to the perception of benefits and prospects. There are cases where the benefits may be "as — or more — important than casualties in determining support." However, he adds, "There is strong evidence that declining perceived benefits or prospects erode public support. In short, Americans do not want to sacrifice lives for causes they do not consider compelling."¹⁴

A study of Somalia clearly shows that peace operations, despite their noble goals and wide public support, don't fall into this category where the desired benefits are equal to or more important than casualties. Initially, there was strong support from the people and Congress for providing forces for the safeguarding of humanitarian supply deliveries, even though the area had little geostrategic importance to the United States and was not compelling in terms of vital interests. However, that support for providing forces was never synonymous with a willingness to incur any casualties, as was the case in traditional military interventions. In fact, Larsen feels that public support was not only contingent upon the pursuit of the initial humanitarian objective, but, in fact, had another component: the mission had to be accomplished with few-to-no casualties.¹⁵

In Somalia, the U.S. forces were withdrawn after a failed raid on a clan leader claimed the lives of 18 American servicemen on 3 October 1993. Following this setback, the United States simply gave up the mission rather than bolster security — with additional forces — as was consistent reaction in previous military commitments throughout history. Although the catastrophic results of the Battle of Mogadishu provided the ultimate trigger for this major policy decision, public support had been waning in the months since the reality of casualties had become apparent. In June, 26 Pakistani peacekeepers were killed, followed by seven U.S. deaths in two incidents during August and September. By the end of September, public support had totally eroded for the mission, prompting Congress to threaten to cut off funds on 15 November 1993 if the mission continued. In Washington, the long-overdue draft policy on peace operations — a fairly solid document — was nearing approval, but now had to be completely rewritten to address the political fallout of the Somalia debacle.

“No single event has done as much to influence peacekeeping in the post-Cold War era,” states Mark Bowden, who authored a study on the incident. He argues that the Somalia mission continues to haunt American peacekeeping decisions to this day and served to delay American involvement in Haiti, Rwanda and Bosnia.¹⁶ Bowden argues that: “In the five years since the humanitarian mission dissolved into combat, Somalia has had a profoundly cautionary influence on American foreign policy. He concludes that the lesson to be learned from Somalia is: If the mission is not worth the loss of life, you don’t undertake it.”¹⁷

The Pain Threshold in the 1990s. The low pain threshold for peace operations evolved from a low pain threshold for military operations in general, including combat operations. Desert Storm is a classic example of the current American view of war. The allies could have ejected Saddam Hussein from Kuwait early in the conflict and attained a traditional military victory but only at a great cost for both sides. However, by introducing additional combat units and high-tech force multipliers — over an extended period of time — extra maneuver options became available to the commanders avoiding an “up the guts” linear confrontation and preserving American lives. However, even with this approach, the results of the four-day ground war exceeded the most optimistic predictions and set an unrealistic standard for future military operations. During four days of massive combined arms warfare conducted at lightning speed, fewer than 150 Americans were lost. Although it was a tragedy for the affected families and friends, Desert Storm was nothing short of a miracle for an operation where some 2,500 casualties was predicted in just one of the front line divisions.¹⁸

The continued infusion of high technology into the military since Desert Storm has only served to reinforce the notion of casualty-free military operations. “A disturbing element in recent U.S. military theory is the stubborn belief that computers and laser-guided bombs will somehow make war almost bloodless,” reports Earnest Blazar. “It can lull the public and civilian leaders into thinking the use of military force is risk free and without consequence.”¹⁹ Stephan Blank, a professor at the U.S. Army War College, feels that those who hold this perception do “not understand modern war.” He dismisses the concept that war can be “sanitized” by the use of “surgical strikes” a myth.²⁰

Any of us who have had surgery know there is no such thing as a “surgical strike.” It is called an invasive procedure for a reason. You just don’t get up and walk out of the hospital when it’s over.²¹

The Peace Operations Standard. Unfortunately, this perception of “cheap war” persists, and has also translated to an even stricter definition for peace operations as well. The so-called “Desert Storm standard,” when translated to peace operations, has produced a tolerance for American

casualties that is very close to zero. Some people have referred to this as the “curse of Desert Storm” for the way it has hamstrung governmental leaders in employment of the military during peacetime. Additionally, the fact that the word “peace” appears in the term “peace operations” provides a significant psychological barrier to the notion of accepting risk from hostile fire. The standard has imposed limitations on all aspects of peace operations from the initial policy debate to the type of peace operation, its duration, and the way military commanders approach the actual conduct of the mission.

During the aftermath of the Somalia operation, America took a step back on full-spectrum multilateral peace enforcement operations. By the U.S. government’s own definition — articulated by the Department of Defense — peace enforcement covers “the application of military force to compel compliance with resolutions and sanctions designed to maintain or restore peace and order.”²² In addition, the UN Charter, while it doesn’t specifically address peace enforcement operations, does allow the use of force to “maintain or restore international peace and security.”²³ However, in the wake of Somalia, American support for restoring peace by immersing U.S. forces into a conflict remains highly unlikely as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. As a result of the low casualty tolerance brought to the fore in Somalia, subsequent multilateral peace operations have focused on traditional peacekeeping or peace enforcement operations where consent of the parties is a precondition.²⁴

The U.S. participation as part of the NATO Implementation Force (IFOR) in Bosnia, in December 1995, is a good example of the self-imposed narrowing of the scope of multilateral peace enforcement operations. Despite a genocide and the bloodiest conflict in Europe since World War II, the United States was unwilling to get involved on the ground until all parties to the conflict formally agreed to stop fighting. Only after peace was codified in the form of the Dayton Peace Accords, would the United States allow its military to enter, as part of a multilateral effort to enforce the accords and maintain the peace. Given the U.S. policy that emerged after Somalia, interjecting ourselves into the ground fighting in Bosnia — although consistent with our own definition of peace enforcement and legal if invoked by the Security Council under Chapter VII — was never a realistic option considered by the United States. Those imploring an American response during the heaviest fighting in Bosnia failed to recognize the new casualty limitation and its effect on the American policy. This policy, although not formally prohibiting mid- to high-intensity peace enforcement operations, is limited by the influence of “cheap victory” in Desert Storm and the peace operations standard that evolved from it that tested against the public in Somalia.

The limitation that the fear of casualties has placed on the use of the military has some in Congress troubled. Rep. Donald Payne (D) of New Jersey stated, “This whole question about the reluctance [to put] the United States military at any place that is dangerous has to really be rethought.” He feels that such a philosophy weakens the ability of the United States to act independently and effectively and believes that “we have to get a redefinition of what a military force is and the realities of a military force. No one wants to hear about casualties.”²⁵ Then-senator Sam Nunn made the same observation when Congress was debating Bosnia:

I don’t want to see us evolve to a point where we have expectations in this country of a war where nobody gets killed on either side, and where we don’t have any collateral damage on the other side.²⁶

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Army General John Shalikashvili, agreed: “I think maybe that issue is an outgrowth of Desert Storm, followed by our experience in Somalia, and I am very concerned about that.”²⁷

This reluctance appears to manifest itself most with respect to cases where troops have the potential to be committed on the ground. Other aspects of the application of U.S. military power in support of peace operations have enjoyed greater freedom from public scrutiny, particularly when the total numbers of Americans at risk are small. For example, NATO airstrikes in Bosnia prior to Dayton proved very effective in enforcing UN resolutions under the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) and was one of many significant factors in bringing the Serbs to the bargaining table at Dayton.²⁸ However, when U.S. Air Force pilot Captain Scott O'Grady was shot down on 2 June 1994, the resulting press coverage brought the support for the UN operation in Bosnia to an all-time low.

When NATO considered action to persuade Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic to ease up on his crackdown on the rebels in Kosovo, it decided to launch Operation Deliberate Falcon, a show of force consisting of 89 aircraft, as a first step. "Was this the best way to send a message?" Earnest Blazar asked. "Perhaps, but it sure was the best way to employ U.S. forces without ruffling the feathers of the people at home."²⁹ Brigadier General Charles F. Wald, head of the Air Force's long-range strategy office, explains:

The only alternative is to go and put 13,000 troops on the ground. You don't hear the American public arguing over Albania. . . . They aren't [protesting] in front of the White House saying we can't have that. You put 13,000 troops on the ground, and I guarantee you the president is going to hear about that.³⁰

The public — and some political leaders — tend to object to casualties among U.S. forces employed in nonground missions only when they occur, rather than during the planning, as is typical in the case of the commitment of large ground formations. This phenomenon seems logical, as ground forces are subject to a wide variety of "around-the-clock" dangers such as terrorism, mines and counterattack that are not applicable to offshore vessels or distant airbases that are sometimes used for peace operations. The danger for nonground forces is perceived as being smaller and more sophisticated, due to its high-tech nature, and apparently more acceptable to the public — until something happens.

If ground troops are involved, the casualty limitation has been observed to influence even the most benign missions. For example, the U.S. contingent that is part of the 750-person UN force in Macedonia came under criticism in the media during April 1998 as the violence in Kosovo highlighted peacekeeping operations in the region. Although the official mission of the 350-person U.S. force was only to monitor and report, rather than stop the fighting should it erupt, *The Washington Post* reported that the United States took extraordinary precautions to ensure that U.S. troops are kept "farther from harm's way than troops of other nations."³¹ Specifically, the *Post* reported that American troops were under strict instructions not to venture within 300 yards of the border and monitored two-thirds less of the border area than that patrolled by the Nordic Battalion, whose sector included volatile Kosovo. The Scandinavian soldiers, it was reported, greatly resented these restrictions and accused the Americans of not being able to observe key territory in their sector. A foreign official stated that the U.S. approach was for "domestic consumption" and that "they do not want to risk having to explain to Congress why any American became a casualty in Macedonia."³²

Although the U.S. public may be reluctant to put U.S. peacekeepers in Macedonia and elsewhere at risk for fear of casualties, there appears to be a different public tolerance for noncombat deaths and injuries during peace operations, although they often receive equal coverage in the media. Task

Force Eagle, the initial U.S. ground force into Bosnia following Dayton, experienced higher than average accident rates in all safety categories, including double the average number of aviation accidents and personnel injuries.³³ Even small personnel losses from mines were accepted by the public as tolerable, when it was determined (and portrayed in the press) that the mines were placed during the Bosnian civil war and were not directed with hostile intent toward the U.S. peace enforcers in the post-Dayton era. After two and one-half years in Bosnia, there appears to be a universal recognition and acceptance that peace operations are more dangerous than other peacetime activities but less dangerous than war, where casualties routinely result from hostile fire.³⁴

Policy Implications. The low tolerance for casualties brought to the fore by Somalia resulted in the clearly defined policy for peace operations doctrine that America badly needed but had failed to develop in the early 1990s. Presidential Decision Directive (PPD) 25, “The Clinton Administration’s Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations,” was finally released in May 1994, just six months after the Battle of Mogadishu. It called for U.S. peace operations to be more “selective and effective” and recognized peace operations as just one tool in the foreign policy suite of potential options to prevent and resolve conflict. PDD-25 listed numerous factors that must be considered before the U.S. would participate in multilateral peace operations, including a ceasefire and the consent of the parties involved in cases where traditional peacekeeping operations were being considered.³⁵

Although PDD-25 provided drastically needed discipline on the decision to commit to new peacekeeping operations, it has come under much criticism due to the influence of the Somalia experience and the casualty limitation. Adam Roberts writes:

PDD-25 is vulnerable to many criticisms. In particular, the characteristic and understandable U.S. anxiety to work out in advance an end point to an operation, coupled with the equally understandable U.S. worry about casualties, can actually encourage local leaders to be obstinate, knowing that they can outlast an embattled peacekeeping force.³⁶

There are also some other policy implications evolving from the low casualty record of recent peace operations, and the perceptions they reinforce. In December 1997, the *Washington Times* reported that the “zero tolerance” for casualties makes it easier for an administration to send troops abroad. If the Pentagon can guarantee near-zero casualties, opposition to a deployment narrows.³⁷ However, such an expectation puts tremendous pressure on the military leaders on the ground to focus on force protection instead of the primary mission and begs a difficult question: If some casualties are incurred, as a cost of doing business, will this undermine an otherwise sound policy? The zero tolerance limitation has also been turned around to support extensions of ongoing peace operations. For example, in the case of Bosnia, former Assistant Secretary of State Richard Holbrooke and retired General George Joulwan both cited “no combat casualties” as a justification for continued operations in Bosnia past the summer of 1998.

This technique of predicting unrealistically low casualties to help support operations that are inherently dangerous has been a cause of concern for Executive Branch leaders and Congress.³⁸ In his remarks to the National Defense University class on 29 January 1998, President Clinton reminded military leaders (and the American people) that “it is not easy to wear the uniform and it is never a completely safe proposition.” He went on to add:

We must be strong and tough and mature as a nation — strong and tough and mature enough to recognize that even the best-prepared, best-equipped force will suffer losses in action. . . . Every casualty is a tragedy all its own for a parent or a child or a friend. But when the cause

is just and the purpose clear, our military men and women are prepared to take that risk. . . . The American people have to be, as well.³⁹

Force Protection

The near-zero tolerance for combat casualties has raised the premium on force protection disproportionately. What was traditionally just one of many important tasks for a military commander has now evolved into the top priority to many as a direct result of the new peace operations standard. This new primacy of force protection is often at the expense of the mission. Although civilian leaders — including the President, the Secretary of Defense and the Deputy Secretary of Defense — have been careful to keep force protection in its proper perspective as “an integral part of mission accomplishment” rather than the mission itself, that feeling is not accepted universally down the chain.⁴⁰

If Somalia is the watershed on casualty tolerance for peace operations, then Khobar Towers provided the watershed event for force protection. On 25 June 1996, a terrorist truck bomb explosion at the U.S. forces housing complex in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia claimed the lives of 19 airmen deployed in support of Operation Southern Watch. Fortunately, the public viewed this operation — which occurred in a active combat zone — in the context of the U.S.-Iraq confrontation, rather than as a peace operation or even a traditional peacetime operation. Had they done otherwise, the entire U.S. operation in the Persian Gulf would have been jeopardized. The application to peace operations is that, like Somalia, the incident brought the issue of casualties to center stage and, in this case, raised the standard of personal accountability to an unprecedented level that impacts U.S. peace operations.

Following the terrorist attack in Saudi Arabia, an exhaustive investigation was undertaken. The resulting report to the President outlined massive institutional changes in the Department of Defense, including appointing the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as the DoD-wide focal point for all force protection activities. Additionally, in July 1997, Secretary of Defense William Cohen announced he was removing the responsible commander, Air Force Brigadier General Terryl Schwailer, from the two-star promotion list despite the fact that he “ably discharged his primary mission of enforcing the no-fly zone in Southern Iraq,” further citing that “we expect a high standard of performance of our commanders in the field who are entrusted with the safety of our troops.” He added that “field commanders . . . are accountable for all that their units do or fail to do.”⁴¹

Although the Secretary made it clear in his statement that enforcing the no-fly zone was the primary mission of Operation Southern Watch, the personal accountability issue for force protection reverberated down through the services. He stated: “All in the chain of command need to draw from this experience those lessons, however painful, which may help others who follow, and who will be at similar risk.” Regrettably, many careerist commanders began treating this as their primary mission. An example of how some have interpreted these developments can be found in this innocent and well-intentioned U.S. Air Force announcement entitled, “Force Protection Is Job One For U.S. Forces In Saudi Arabia.”⁴² The criticism that avoiding casualties, rather than accomplishing the mission at hand, has become the primary purpose of the military is well documented in peace operations all over the globe, including Bosnia.

A review of the Department of Defense’s definition of force protection reveals some ambitious tasks and challenges; however, all are defensive in nature. Implementation of this program, sure to preserve lives, will not in itself accomplish the mission. The DoD dictionary defines force protection

as a security program designed to protect soldiers, civilian employees, family members, facilities and equipment, in all locations and situations, accomplished through planned and integrated application of combating terrorism, physical security, operations security, personal protective services, and supported by intelligence, counterintelligence and other security programs.⁴³

In combat, a commander cannot substitute force protection — or any other important task — in place of mission accomplishment without jeopardizing the successful accomplishment of the campaign or battle. If he is too conservative and lacks the aggressiveness to pursue the objective, then this will be apparent in the outcome where he must balance force protection and operational freedom. Force protection and other important priorities compete with one another and are balanced delicately to achieve overall mission success. In peace operations, since success revolves around so many other factors — economic, governmental, diplomatic, humanitarian — the military can rarely carry the entire operation to a successful conclusion on its own. But, given the American intolerance to casualties, the military component can certainly cause it to fail in the court of public opinion. Therefore, the temptation exists today for military commanders to decide to play “not to lose” rather than “to win.” The Bosnia-Herzegovina After Action Review (BHAAR I) Conference Report published by the U.S. Army Peacekeeping Institute concluded:

In OJE (Operation Joint Endeavor) the force protection effort rose to the level of actually being part of the stated mission and above the level of the other three battlefield combat dynamics (firepower, leadership, maneuver). . . . Additionally, the perception among the participants was that force protection measures in OJE were not based on a valid risk assessment, often stifled the operational commander’s flexibility, and clearly fostered the overall perception of a “zero defects” mentality/environment.”⁴⁴

Many political and military leaders now feel that risk management, integral to all military operations, does not include taking risks with the lives of America’s sons and daughters in the name of peace. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General John Shalikashvili expressed his concern to Congress:

Not only are we setting a standard by which this country will judge us but [a standard]. . . that might begin to have an impact on our young [commanders who] have the sense that if they go into an operation, and despite their best efforts, suffer casualties, that someone’s going to be looking over their shoulders. How tragic it would be if we did that because we would grow a group of leaders who, through their hesitancy, would begin to endanger people.⁴⁵

For example, today’s military commanders in Bosnia are often being criticized by civilian relief agencies and think tanks for not doing more to enforce the nonmilitary tasks of the Dayton Peace Accords in Annexes I B through I I. The BHAAR I reported:

Many participants felt that U.S. force protection measures seemed to be politically motivated and clearly not based on a realistic threat assessment. . . . Force protection requirements severely limited CSS (combat service support) availability to support nonmilitary functions.

More importantly, the U.S. levels of force protection were significantly different from other nations. These inconsistencies lead to two specific areas of concern. First, stringent U.S. force protection measures directly hampered civil-military cooperation and the ability for U.S. soldiers to move away from the peace enforcement mission only mindset. Second . . . many non-U.S. members were concerned that this inconsistency was sending mixed signals to the warring factions.⁴⁶

This move to politically-motivated accountability stemming from the fear of casualties has raised the premium on force protection. Military leaders cannot be faulted for their reluctance to limit their involvement to their formal tasks, given the peace operations standard and the stakes involved. Casualties in peace operations have national political and policy consequences that military leaders feel they are not empowered to risk. The key leader and organizational energy that many people feel the military should expend on other tasks outlined in the Dayton Peace Accords is being expended, first, on Annex 1A, "Military Aspects of the Peace Settlement" and then on force protection.⁴⁷ Annex 1A states what the military is formally expected to accomplish; taking on other nonspecified tasks are interpreted, by many, as putting a top priority — force protection — at risk.

The caution in Bosnia is not without precedent in the post-Cold War peace operations world. The aforementioned Macedonia experience occurred prior to Bosnia, chronologically. When Major General W.H. Yates, deployed an infantry battalion from The Berlin Brigade to perform the first U.S. peacekeeping mission in the former Yugoslav republic of Macedonia, he noted:

My initial concern for the task force deploying to Operation ABLE SENTRY was force protection. Some UN military commanders don't understand our preoccupation with this issue because they are not faced with the same threat as U.S. forces. They don't understand that because we are the American Army, we are an isolated target of opportunity.⁴⁸

To mitigate some of this danger, U.S. commanders and diplomats have been forced to take a harder line in the types of missions the United States is willing to accept during particular peace operations. Traditionally it was often assumed that the military would provide a wide range of functions commensurate with its overall capabilities, particularly during times of peace where competing priorities were minimal or nonexistent. These expectations were particularly high in areas where the environment is austere, like Somalia, or where the infrastructure has been destroyed, as in the case of Bosnia. However, given the renewed emphasis on force protection and the development of a more defined doctrine in PDD-25, the military is shying away from additional tasks that are not specifically mandated by the national command authority.

A specific area that has come under criticism in Bosnia is the issue of the apprehension of indicted war criminals, particularly Radivan Karadzic and General Ratko Mladic, the Serb political and military leaders during the war. While most agree that this is one of most significant tasks still to be completed in Bosnia, there appears to be little U.S. military support for an operation to secure their arrest. Although conventional combat and special operations forces are more than capable of such a task, some casualties would be inevitable, military planners believe. Since the apprehension of war criminals is not a formal task outlined in Annex 1A of the Dayton Peace Accords (the military annex), the military is not formally compelled to perform such a mission. In the absence of such direct guidance, the focus shifts to force protection, which, in the case of Bosnia, was a formal task in the military plans.

Many argue that the main reluctance to apprehend war criminals is the unwillingness to accept casualties either in the apprehensions themselves or from potential retaliation by their parent groups, after the fact. In Somalia, the conflict between UN forces and the Habre Gedir clan and its leader, Mohammed Farah Aidid, underscores the dangers of going after specific groups or individuals. Over time, the original security mission there escalated into a war between the clan and the U.S. peacekeepers. In Bosnia, a more aggressive campaign toward apprehending war criminals by the NATO Stabilization Force (SFOR) was viewed by some as an unnecessary risk to peacekeepers, a carry-over from the experience in Somalia. Many military leaders resent the notion that the problems

encountered in recruiting, training and standing up an international police force should automatically default this problem to the military component of the operation — IFOR.

By the summer of 1998, the issue came to a head and the *New York Times* reported that decisions had been made to abandon plans for a secret military operation to apprehend these individuals, citing concerns in the military over casualties.⁴⁹ After an estimated expenditure of \$100 million on intelligence gathering and the deployment of special operations forces to Europe, “White House officials — including President Clinton — could not convince the military that arresting the indicted men was a risk worth taking, present and former administration officials said.”⁵⁰ Ambassador Peter Galbraith, the former U.S. ambassador to Croatia and a strong supporter of apprehension, stated: “They’ve [the military] been cautious. One wants one’s military to be cautious and careful, but still operational.”⁵¹

Force Protection is a Task, Not a Mission Statement. Despite the potential danger to American personnel and the increased emphasis on accountability, it is essential that the task of force protection not escalate in importance to eclipse the mission. Commanders are particularly vulnerable to this when public opinion and Congress have not fully demonstrated their support for an operation, as was the case during the initial stages of the Bosnia operation. In Europe, where the Bosnia force originated, some commanders allowed force protection to take on a disproportionate importance, jeopardizing other troop-leading procedures of equal or greater importance. Commanders and units that are overly concerned with force protection not only jeopardize the mission but could be placing the force at greater risk down the road. All military operations involve risks, and peace operations are not exempt from the dangers of military life. While “a top priority” as stated by the Commander in Chief and the two ranking civilian leaders in the Pentagon, it’s not “the priority.” That can be reserved only for the mission at hand.

The low tolerance for casualties in a perceived era of “cheap war,” coupled with the tragic circumstances in Somalia, have created the major limitation of American military peace operations as we enter the 21st century. It has shaped a more restrictive policy on multilateral peace operations in PDD-25, molded public opinion, and influenced the way that military commanders execute their peace missions. The long-term impact on peace operations will be major, leading to increased reluctance to enter into peace operations at the national level. This concern caused the BHAAR I Conference to conclude:

This issue has the potential to have significant implications in our ability to project national power. There is a clear international, and even U.S., perception that our overwhelming concern over force protection greatly reduces our willingness to use our military as an effective tool in peace operations.⁵²

In execution, the potential effectiveness of the limited peace operations that are undertaken will be hampered even more, as many military commanders confine themselves only to their formal obligations, choosing to play it safe. Implied tasks, not formally directed to the military, will be looked upon warily by commanders as “mission creep,” of the nature that escalated Somalia from a humanitarian mission to armed conflict with a tribal leader. This reluctance will be rewarded by conserving critical assets for force protection where accountability will remain high, as emphasized by the Secretary of Defense at the Khobar Towers press conference and the President in his State of the Union Address, where he stated emphatically, “We must also demand greater accountability.”⁵³

Endnotes

1. There were no vetoes cast in the Security Council from mid-1990 to mid-1993. From 1945-90, there were 234 total vetoes. Adam Roberts, "The Crisis in UN Peacekeeping," in *Managing Global Chaos*, eds. Chester A. Crocker, Fen Osler Hampson, and Pamela Aall (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1996).
2. "Peace operations" is a broad term that encompasses peacekeeping operations and peace enforcement operations conducted in support of diplomatic efforts to establish and maintain peace. Peacekeeping operations are military operations undertaken with the consent of all major parties to a dispute, designed to monitor and facilitate implementation of an agreement and support diplomatic efforts to reach a long-term political settlement. Peace enforcement involves the application of military force, or the threat of its use, normally pursuant to international authorization, to compel compliance with resolutions or sanctions designed to maintain or restore peace and order. Department of Defense. *DoD Dictionary*. Updated through April 1997 (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, 1994), pp. 401-402.
3. These six major operations were Operation Provide Comfort in relief of the Kurds in Northern Iraq; Operation Restore Hope in Somalia; Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti; Operation Able Sentry in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; Operation Joint Endeavor (later Operation Joint Guard) in Bosnia, and the MFO mission in the Sinai, a product of the Camp David Agreement. The MFO mission is the only mission that carried over from the 1980s.
4. Steven Komarow, "For Military, Bosnia has Become a Blessing," *USA Today*, December 22, 1997.
5. Office of the President. National Security Council. *A National Security Strategy of Engagement and Enlargement* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1995), p. 16.
6. Komarow, "For Military, Bosnia Has Become a Blessing."
7. Benjamin C. Schwartz, *Casualties, Public Opinion and U.S. Military Intervention: Implications for U.S. Regional Deterrence Strategies* (Santa Monica, Calif.: RAND Corporation, 1994), p. ix.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 12. This is significant, given that the fact the United States possessed an impressive arsenal of atomic weapons at this time.
10. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 17-20.
13. Eric V. Larsen, *Casualties and Consensus* (Santa Monica, Calif: RAND Corporation, 1996), p. 50.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. 50-51.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
16. Mark Bowden, "Somalia Revisited," *Washington Times*, November 24, 1997.
17. Mark Bowden, "Death of 18 U.S. Troops Haunts American View on Peacekeeping," *Washington Times*, January 22, 1998.

18. The 24th Infantry Division, the unit that conducted the famous left hook and attacked the Republican Guard, anticipated up to 2,500 casualties in their tactical planning prior to the attack. This was based on the chemical threat and forecasted losses due to conventional means.
19. "Inside the Ring," *Washington Times*, June 29, 1998, p. A9.
20. *Ibid.*, p. A9.
21. *Ibid.*, p. A9.
22. Joint Pub 1- 02, p. 401.
23. Chapter VII, Article 42 of the United Nations Charter states, "Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations." United Nations. *Charter of the United Nations* (San Francisco, Calif.: United Nations, 1945).
24. "Low end" peace enforcement operations, such as in Bosnia, are not limited, per se, by formal U.S. policy articulated in Presidential Decision Directive 25. Although peace enforcement operations, by definition and policy, do not require consent of the warring factions, it was considered a critical component of the U.S. position, following the experience in Somalia. It is highly unlikely, given the emphasis on preventing casualties, that the United States will ever fight its way into a situation to enforce a peace. In application, peacekeeping and peace enforcement are virtually the same.
25. Earnest Blazar, "Confused by Success," *Washington Times*, November 13, 1997, A7.
26. Dana Priest, "Fear of Casualties Drives Bosnia Debate," *The Washington Post*, December 2, 1995, p. A1.
27. *Ibid.*, p. A1.
28. Another major factor attributed to bringing the Serbs to the table in late 1995 is the Croatian successful counteroffensive in the Krajina earlier that year.
29. Earnest Blazar, "Packaging Forces," *Washington Times*, June 29, 1998, p. A9.
30. *Ibid.*, p. A9.
31. R. Jeffrey Smith, "U.S. Fine-Tunes Focus of Macedonian Mission," *The Washington Post*, April 1, 1998, p. A24.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
33. This was later attributable to unfamiliar terrain, poor weather and higher operational tempo (OPTEMPO). Department of Defense. 1st Armored Division Safety Office. "Task Force Eagle Safety Update," typescript, August 31, 1996. Safety categories tracked were: aviation, wheeled vehicle accidents, tracked vehicle accidents and personnel injuries.
34. The U.S. military incurs over 200 fatalities in training accidents and other routine peacetime operations, including peace operations, in the course of any given year, on average.
35. Department of State. "The Clinton Administration's Policy on Multilateral Peace Operations" (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of State Publication 10161, May 1994), p. 4 [hereafter

PDD 25]. Chapter VI refers to that chapter in the Charter of the United Nations that deals with pacific settlement of disputes. United Nations, *Charter of the United Nations* (San Francisco, Calif., 1945).

36. Roberts, "The Crisis in UN Peacekeeping," p. 310.
37. Blazar, "Confused by Success," p. A7.
38. Bosnia, for example, is classified as a hostile fire zone. Military personnel serving there are given allowances, tax breaks and awards commensurate with the expectation of coming under hostile fire.
39. White House press release, "Remarks by the President at National Defense University," January 29, 1998.
40. Deputy Secretary of Defense John P. White, cited in Department of Defense. "DoD Announces New Military Force Protection Measures," Department of Defense, typescript, September 16, 1996. President Clinton, in his NDU speech, used these words: "We will always make their [military personnel] safety a top priority." See "Remarks by the President," p. 13. See also Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen, cited in Department of Defense "Personal Accountability for Force Protection at Khobar Towers" (Washington, D.C.: Department of Defense, July 31, 1997).
41. Secretary of Defense William S. Cohen quoted in DoD report "Personal Accountability for Force Protection at Khobar Towers," July 31, 1997.
42. Department of the Air Force. "Force Protection Is Job One For U.S. Forces In Saudi Arabia," January 30, 1998. Public statement available on the World Wide Web at http://www.af.mil/photos/c0996_dara7.html.
43. Joint Pub 1-02, p. 218.
44. U.S. Army Peacekeeping Institute. *Bosnia-Herzegovina After Action Review (BHAAR I) Conference Report* (Carlisle, Pa.: U.S. Army Peacekeeping Institute, 1996), p. 23 [hereafter, BHAAR].
45. Priest, "Fear of Casualties Drives Bosnia Debate," p. A1.
46. BHAAR, pp. 23-24.
47. Department of State. *The Dayton Peace Accords* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, 1996).
48. Department of Defense. *Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook for Peace Operations* (Fort Monroe, Va.: Joint Warfighting Center, June 1997), p. X-3.
49. *New York Times*, "US Cancels Plans For Raid On Bosnia to Capture 2 Serbs," July 26, 1998, p. 1.
50. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
51. *Ibid.*, p. 1.
52. BHAAR, p. 24.
53. President William Jefferson Clinton, "The State of the Union Address by the President," White House press release, typescript, January 27, 1998.

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