

# The Origins and Evolution of US Policy Towards Peace Operations

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This article contends that the William Clinton and George W. Bush administrations experienced similar transformations in their respective policies towards UN peace operations and nation-building. Although they began from nearly opposite perspectives, both came to remarkably similar conclusions about the value of peace operations, UN-led or otherwise, as tools for US foreign policy. Initial positions, driven in part by ideological concerns, gave way to more pragmatism about how the United States would support UN peace operations, reinforced by experiences with Congress and at the UN. A defining feature of this pragmatism was a deep reluctance to contribute significant numbers of troops to UN-commanded operations, even as both administrations supported increases in the number and scale of UN missions.

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With the growth in UN peace operations since the end of the cold war, the United States has played an influential role in setting their direction, while also sending conflicting signals about whether it truly supports these operations. The contrasts in US policy are striking. On the one hand, the United States has been a routine financial and materiel supporter of international troops to help prevent cycles of conflict from continuing in troubled areas. From its seat on the Security Council, it has often voted for ambitious peacekeeping missions and has urged the UN into tough spots, ranging from Somalia and the Balkans to the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Afghanistan. The United States is also responsible for the greatest share of the UN peacekeeping budget, just over 25 per cent, a billion dollars annually since 2005. On the other hand, the United States has criticized UN peacekeeping failures and rarely provided troops to UN-led operations. It has scrutinized every dollar proposed, often playing the role of 'budget Scrooge' and thereby affecting the deployment and design of missions. In the past, long overdue US funding for assessed contributions to UN peacekeeping operations created arrears that nearly crippled the institution. The United States is among the nations that call loudly for UN reform, but its government has been inconsistent in putting political muscle behind enhancing UN capacity for its missions.

This essay considers US government views of peace operations,<sup>1</sup> sketching the trajectory from the 1990s to the mid-2000s, with a focus on key themes of US policy and the domestic debates that have influenced the formulation of current policy on peace operations.<sup>2</sup> We demonstrate the fluctuating policies of both the William Clinton and George W. Bush administrations by looking at the shifting rhetorical, financial, policy and institutional support of the UN in this field. What, then, are the enduring trends behind policy on UN peace operations?

## Enduring Trends

Overall, two broad trends are clear. First, both the Clinton and Bush administrations came to office with broad, relatively ideological political beliefs about peace operations – and then changed their minds. Whereas the Clinton administration viewed peace operations with early enthusiasm, the Bush administration entered with strong distrust. Clinton initially faced a world freed of the US–Soviet rivalry and bursting with new interest in UN-led efforts to bring peace. That support for peace operations was quickly challenged when UN missions foundered. The Bush administration, on the other hand, entered office sceptical of the utility of peace operations. It soon faced the terror attacks of 11 September 2001, which led to a greater recognition of the value of peace operations in rebuilding failing states as part of the war on terror, and which accelerated a sidelining of ideologically driven opposition to the UN. The Bush administration then came closer to where the Clinton administration ended up – though generally for fighting terrorism rather than for broader purposes of international stability – in seeing US interests often better served through multilateral efforts led or supported by the UN. From different starting points, each administration was obliged to view the risks posed by either underestimating the difficulty of peace operations or underestimating the role of failed or failing states in relation to US interests. This resulted in their viewpoints shifting to see such missions more dispassionately and cautiously while recognizing them as important and, at times, necessary.

Second, the Clinton and Bush administrations moved to enhance, if not deeply embrace, such missions as an operational tool to serve US interests. Both administrations cited peace operations as supporting national security and humanitarian goals, rather than one or the other. Thus, below the level of high rhetoric and political debates, Clinton and Bush turned to strengthening the UN's capacity. By the mid-2000s, the UN had more capacity to lead and manage peace operations, and US policy support was less hindered by the long-standing domestic political controversy that had been such a factor just a decade before.

Thus, in the aftermath of the US-led interventions in Afghanistan in 2001 and in Iraq in 2003, the United States became more balanced in its policy approach to peace operations. But that equilibrium is precarious: the United States remains poised between viewing peacekeeping as a humanitarian exercise (e.g., Darfur, Sudan) and as serving US or international security interests (e.g., Afghanistan). And while US policy debates may have become more settled, the UN now faces some of its hardest challenges with an overstretched capacity. Given the US positions in Afghanistan and Iraq, it is unlikely a new president would walk away from the UN. The question is whether the United States will maintain its basic, if cautious, support or become a more vigorous leader as the UN takes on yet another new generation of peace operations.

## US Administrations and UN Operations, 1990s to mid-2000s

With the end of the cold war, the UN experienced renewed optimism about its role as an international actor. After UN authorization of the US-led coalition to

oust Iraq from Kuwait, the United States supported a host of new peacekeeping missions under UN leadership. Indeed, President George H.W. Bush paid off outstanding debts to the UN, instructed the military to place new emphasis on peacekeeping planning and training, and supported a surge in UN-led missions.<sup>3</sup> With paralysis of the Security Council over, Bush declared a 'new world order', approved new UN operations (in Angola, Cambodia, Central America, Mozambique, Namibia, Western Sahara, the former Yugoslavia and El Salvador, and launched the UN-authorized, US-led humanitarian intervention in Somalia in December 1992.

President Clinton inherited this great expansion, then the largest since the UN's founding.<sup>4</sup> Further, the United States cast these operations – such as the US-led effort in Somalia – as primarily humanitarian exercises and peace settlement efforts. They were seen as having a strong chance at success in view of the outcomes of UN missions to Namibia and Central America. Yet other operations, such as those in Angola and the former Yugoslavia, underscored the risk of failure. In these cases, peacekeepers faced daunting situations that were unlike traditional peacekeeping observation and monitoring. US support for UN-led peacekeeping rested on ambitions for its success, a hope that was quickly dimmed by the mixed record of operations in the early 1990s.

### *The Clinton Years*

Early on, the Clinton administration coined the term 'assertive multilateralism', signalling an embrace of UN and peace operations, and approved new UN operations in Georgia, Uganda-Rwanda, Liberia, Haiti, Rwanda and Somalia during its first year.<sup>5</sup> The administration also launched a peacekeeping policy review in February 1993 by Presidential Review Directive 13 (PRD-13), which some expected to embrace a proactive, supportive stance towards UN operations. By mid-1993, however, Clinton's decision to support an expanded UN and US role in Somalia proved pivotal. The Somalia missions were generally ignored by the public until the abrupt loss of 18 American lives in Mogadishu on 3 October 1993, in a US-led mission that turned into a battle with Somali fighters. Facing an outraged Congress, Clinton agreed to withdraw US troops from Somalia by the following March, just a month before the Rwandan genocide began. Even before the Somalia firefight, Clinton faced pressure from Congress about rising UN peacekeeping costs and the appropriateness of a direct US role in such operations. Despite low US fatality rates for soldiers in other peace operations, the deaths in Somalia created a fear of US military casualties in peacekeeping and a concern with foreign command and control over US personnel. The administration backed away from contributing troops or providing clear support for UN operations. The mission to Somalia and the accompanying debate in Washington over peacekeeping proved to be a watershed, marking the start of a new era of US restraint and caution that still affects US peace-operations policy 15 years later.<sup>6</sup>

At the same time, the administration's policy review process (PRD-13) underwent alterations to reflect the changing political circumstances surrounding peace operations. Clinton signed the resulting policy, Presidential Decision Directive 25

(PDD-25), 'US Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations', and released a public version in May 1994. PDD-25 provided criteria for US decision-making about participation in or political support for UN operations, the first 'comprehensive framework' for such decision-making in the post-cold war period. While stating that peace operations were not and could not be the centrepiece of US foreign policy, it regarded properly conceived and well-executed missions as a useful vehicle for advancing America's interests. The directive identified specific steps to improve US and UN management of peace operations to ensure that their use was selective and more effective.<sup>7</sup> The guarded tone and substance of PDD-25 strongly suggested that the Clinton administration had reconsidered 'assertive multilateralism' and its inclination to support UN peace operations, especially in areas without clear US national security interests.

No one needed PDD-25 to understand how apprehensive Clinton had become over UN peace operations, as it was released almost a full month after the start of the genocide in Rwanda. The administration's response to the genocide is well documented elsewhere, but it is worth recalling the role played by the United States in the Security Council in response to the deteriorating situation in Rwanda. The United States called for withdrawing the bulk of the UN force, over the pleas from the UN commander in the field, and despite the growing misgivings of Ambassador Madeleine Albright about withdrawal. The administration framed its options for dealing with the deadly spasm of violence through a strict interpretation of its new PDD, and joined Belgium in calling for a total pull-out.<sup>8</sup>

Even with its effort to cast US policy as judicious, the Clinton administration faced animated and often acrimonious opposition to its support for peacekeeping missions. The administration's critics were also motivated by general opposition to Clinton policies, demonstrated by partisan debates between the White House and Congress on the use of US military forces. Funding debates became another focus of contention for Congress, especially as US funding for UN operations rose with the level of peacekeepers to over US\$1 billion in 1993 out of the UN total of \$3.6 billion. Crises in the public eye – including the unsuccessful effort to enforce the Governors Island accord for Haiti in 1993, the failure to intervene in Rwanda to halt the genocide in 1994, and the struggle to grapple with the conflict in the Balkans – overshadowed successful operations in Namibia, Mozambique and El Salvador and further undercut congressional support.

The domestic debate on peacekeeping became increasingly politicized and polarized. By 1995, a newly Republican-controlled Congress argued for more conditions on participation in UN missions and denying hundreds of millions of dollars in funding for UN peace operations, leading to substantial arrears to the UN. Congress limited US in-kind support to UN missions, requiring reimbursement for goods and services above \$3 million per year per operation. Capitol Hill legislated a requirement that the administration brief key congressional committees before any Security Council vote on a new or extended mandate for a peace operation – and identify the source of US funding for the anticipated operation. While not an actual veto power over the US position on the Security Council, Congress' 15-day notification requirement forced the administration

to provide detailed justifications to Congress for each vote. This notification and justification process helped dampen support for new peace operations for the remainder of the Clinton administration, leading the State Department to try to reduce the scale of UN peacekeeping, and obliging the United States to argue for fewer troops and exercise caution at the Security Council.

By the mid-1990s, these issues moved from discussions in foreign policy circles to more public and political arenas and the presidential campaign of 1996. Republican candidates, ranging from conservative activist Pat Buchanan to internationalist Senator Robert Dole (R-KS), heavily criticized the UN Secretary-General, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and Clinton's support for the UN and its peace operations.

At the same time, the second half of the 1990s ushered in a steep decline in the number of UN personnel, and by the spring of 1999, there were fewer than 13,000 peacekeepers in 14 UN missions.<sup>9</sup> With the lull, the Clinton administration moved to enhance US and international capacity to organize and manage peacekeeping better by putting greater emphasis on regional organizations and NATO to lead such missions in the Balkans and elsewhere. This work was not cast as an effort to support the UN's capacity or future leadership of such missions, though it could have that impact. In May 1997, for example, the White House addressed the US interagency, political-military planning process for peace operations and related contingencies with PDD-56, the 'Clinton Administration's Policy on Managing Complex Contingency Operations'. The PDD gave examples of such operations, citing 'situations as diverse as Haiti, Somalia, Northern Iraq, and the former Yugoslavia', and pointed out that in such places:

[t]he United States has engaged in complex contingency operations in coalition, either under the auspices of an international or regional organization or in ad hoc, temporary coalitions of like-minded states. While never relinquishing the capability to respond unilaterally, the PDD assumes that the U.S. will continue to conduct future operations in coalition whenever possible.

The PDD was intended to justify why 'complex contingency operations' (comprising 'political/diplomatic, humanitarian, intelligence, economic development, and security' dimensions) were important. It defined them as both traditional humanitarian assistance and more robust missions requiring the use of force for peace implementation. The administration offered examples: 'peace operations such as the peace accord implementation operation conducted by NATO in Bosnia (since 1995) and the humanitarian intervention in northern Iraq called Operation *Provide Comfort* (1991); and foreign humanitarian assistance operations, such as Operation *Support Hope* in central Africa (1994) and Operation *Sea Angel* in Bangladesh (1991)'. With this definition, the administration acknowledged the range of missions that met both humanitarian and security goals. The administration also moved to establish an interagency process for peace operations, increased funding to regional organizations to support such missions, and funded bilateral military training to support deployment of other nations' peacekeepers, such as the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI),

the Enhanced International Peacekeeping Capacities (EIPC) programme, and Operation *Focus Relief* (OFR). These programmes built on an enduring concern with the quality, availability and effectiveness of troops offered to UN-led missions.

By 1999, however, the United States supported a return to UN peace operations. In short order, the Clinton administration backed new missions to troubled lands – and gave UN forces ambitious missions. In one year, the Security Council authorized new UN-led operations to East Timor (Timor-Leste), Sierra Leone, the DRC (formerly Zaire) and Kosovo (in addition to the NATO-led force there). In 2000, another mission followed on the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea. This surge challenged the UN and the DPKO, which was still suffering from the overstretch of the early to mid-1990s. But the Clinton administration did not have full congressional support for these operations. Congress remained sceptical of the necessity and of the ability of the UN to succeed. The administration was already battling with Congress over paying assessed US contributions to past UN operations – a debt of over \$1 billion. A deal crafted by Senators Jesse Helms (R–NC) and Joseph Biden (D–DE) was negotiated with the State Department from 1997 to 1999.<sup>10</sup> Once approved, the legislation required the United States to win a reduction in its share of costs for UN peacekeeping to 25 per cent, among other conditions and reforms. This job fell to the US Permanent Representative to the UN, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who had the unenviable task of trying to reduce US costs while negotiating US support for new UN operations and holding complaints of US indebtedness at bay.<sup>11</sup>

The administration also faced congressional ‘holds’ on hundreds of thousands of dollars in current-year budgets for the four new operations in 1999. This funding jam took months of State Department briefings and negotiations to convince a few key congressional leaders to release the funds. In particular, ‘holds’ by Senator Judd Gregg (R–NH) on US payments for the new UN operations in Sierra Leone, East Timor, Kosovo and the DRC complicated efforts to solve the funding controversy, further dogging US–UN relations and placing new missions on unstable financial ground.<sup>12</sup> The operation in Sierra Leone was particularly difficult, especially after rebels took UN peacekeepers hostage in May 2000. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke met Gregg and his colleagues to structure a plan to buttress the UN force (known as UNAMSIL) and satisfy congressional concerns about any UN mission. The solution was to give UNAMSIL a more forceful mandate and allow it to confront the Revolutionary United Front. But there were two key problems in New York. First, Holbrooke argued against increasing troop levels beyond those approved the previous February, despite the fact that the new mandate required more personnel and resources. Second, the major troop contributors protested that they had not signed up for this type of mission and its increased risks, or without a western country sharing risks in the UN chain of command.<sup>13</sup> US reluctance to push for more UN resources confirmed the view of many UN member states that the United States was mainly concerned with keeping costs down. In Washington, however, members of Congress questioned whether the United States should vote for such missions, even when they did not involve US personnel.

Congress next asked why another difficult mission, in the DRC, was a priority and how the UN could achieve peace in an area fraught with multiple rebel groups and meddling neighbouring nations – deemed a ‘world war’ by Albright. As negotiations unfolded in late 1999 and early 2000, the United States raised questions in New York over the proposed UN mandate and operation size. Some in the UN Secretariat and many delegations urged the Security Council to authorize a large, robust mission with the same level of assistance pouring into Kosovo and East Timor. The United States, with discreet support from other permanent members, argued that the operation should be more modest until the parties proved their commitment to the peace process and provided acceptable security guarantees. After protracted debate, agreement was reached on a force capped at 5,537 troops and military observers, though that number would rise in later phases of the mission’s mandate.<sup>14</sup> The force strength and the mandate suggested to critics that the United States had won the day in keeping the troop numbers low despite the security challenges presented by the size and lack of infrastructure in the DRC. Whatever the merits of the rationale to keep the burden of progress on the parties instead of the UN, the United States was perceived as being more interested in cost reduction than ending a brutal civil war.<sup>15</sup>

### *Clinton’s Legacy*

Even with a revival of UN peacekeeping at the end of the Clinton administration, the United States lacked a consistent policy. The United States had not turned its back on UN peace operations, as many had feared in 1994. But it made no large contributions of troops to UN operations and preferred working through NATO, multinational coalitions for enforcement actions, and efforts to support regional organizations. The Clinton record revealed a steady resolve to stress fiscal restraint as well. By the end of its tenure, the Clinton administration had established peace operations as a burden-sharing tool that served US and international interests, but one that should be used judiciously.

The notion that the United States was as concerned about costs in the formulation of peace operation mandates as with preparing for worst-case scenarios took root during the Clinton years. The administration had finally won congressional passage of the ‘deal’ to pay nearly a billion dollars of its UN arrears (most if not all the US debt owed), over three years and as dozens of conditions were met. This focus on finance was related to another element of the Clinton legacy: the emergence of Congress as an ever-present actor in deliberations. As a consequence, the UN planners were now as inclined to evaluate what was feasible from the standpoint of what Congress was likely to approve, as to plan for what the mandate required. This posture of Congress amounted to a *de facto* second US veto in the eyes of most delegations working on these issues, and this often served to heighten frustration with US positions on proposed missions. At the UN, the funding arguments wore thin, even as Holbrooke ultimately won a reduced assessment rate. Other UN member states had limited patience with the domestic political forces affecting Clinton’s approach to the UN and peace operations, and saw the US response to successive crises throughout the 1990s as uneven. Whether in the role of leader or sceptic, the United States was, in the

words of one former Security Council diplomat, the one country with whom all proposals ‘must be squared’.<sup>16</sup> This state of affairs would not change with the arrival of the Bush administration.

*Enter the Bush Administration: Persuaded by Circumstances?*

In contrast to the Clinton administration’s inclination to embrace peace operations, George W. Bush came to office sceptical of the UN’s role and of the utility of its missions. But like Clinton, Bush faced an increase in new and complicated operations.

During his campaign, Bush had characterized isolationism as a ‘short-cut to chaos’.<sup>17</sup> Yet Bush and his advisers called for an approach to foreign policy that set them apart from the Democratic nominee, Vice-President Al Gore. When asked about how the world should view the United States, and its power, Bush replied:

It really depends upon how our nation conducts itself in foreign policy. If we’re an arrogant nation, they’ll resent us. If we’re a humble nation, but strong, they’ll welcome us ... our nation stands alone right now in the world in terms of power, and that’s why we have to be humble. And yet project strength in a way that promotes freedom.<sup>18</sup>

Bush emphasized that an overly ambitious and unfocused Clinton foreign policy had stretched the US military, causing capital investments, training and morale to suffer from ‘nation-building’ missions that had little, if any, connection to national interests.<sup>19</sup> Bush’s running mate, Dick Cheney, charged that the Clinton administration had ‘overused and under-resourced’ the military.<sup>20</sup> The Bush–Cheney ticket offered to review overseas deployments in countries such as Bosnia and Kosovo, despite the small number of US troops deployed there relative to those in Germany, South Korea or Japan.<sup>21</sup>

Further, Bush indicated his opposition to sending US forces to intervene against genocide, saying that he ‘would work with world organizations and encourage them to move, but I would not commit our troops. I would not send the United States troops into Rwanda.’<sup>22</sup> Bush also called for troop reductions in the Balkans and argued that the United States could scale back its commitment in that region by convincing the European allies ‘to become peacekeepers’, though the Europeans already constituted the vast majority of NATO troops in both Bosnia and Kosovo.

The new administration’s views on UN-led peace operations were less clear.<sup>23</sup> Like its predecessors, the Bush administration sought to distance itself from the previous team, and shunned or reversed decisions Clinton made on international agreements and treaties, including rescinding signature to the International Criminal Court (ICC).<sup>24</sup> At the UN, few expected radical changes, just a shade more cautious even than Clinton’s policies. Many delegations and observers saw that the UN diplomacy of the United States was largely driven by Washington politics that emphasized penny-pinching more than leadership on peace operations.

*Bush Policy and Rhetorical Support for Peace Operations*

At home, critics of Clinton’s support for peace operations often argued that US armed forces were ill-suited or inappropriate for such missions. Others argued



that the armed services had undertaken non-combat roles since the 1800s. A 1998 Center for Naval Analyses study observed that, historically, 'the Navy has participated in almost every conceivable mission', including 'diplomatic, nation-building support, and colonial administrative missions'.<sup>25</sup> The Army's 1994 field manual for peace operations noted: 'Since 1948, U.S. soldiers have served in many such operations – to include the United Nations Truce Supervisory Organization in the Middle East, Lebanon (1958), the Dominican Republic (1965), and the Sinai (since 1982) as members of a multinational force and observers (MFO).'<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, the armed forces were not deployed extensively in peace operations when Bush took office in 2001.<sup>27</sup> They were in NATO-commanded peace operations in the Balkans, but not in large numbers: over 4,000 in the Stabilization Force in Bosnia (SFOR) and over 5,000 in the Kosovo Peace Implementation Force (KFOR), out of a total military of 1.37 million.<sup>28</sup> The United States provided fewer than 1,000 military personnel as peacekeepers in the MFO mission in the Middle East that stemmed from the Camp David Accords. None of these were UN-led, and only about 880 American personnel were serving in eight UN missions, but the vast majority (836) of these were civilian police. The rest were military observers except for a lone soldier in the UN mission in Ethiopia/Eritrea.<sup>29</sup>

Three years later, President Bush had neither substantially drawn down these modest commitments nor embraced the use of US forces for peace operations and humanitarian missions. By autumn 2003, the US contribution to UN-led peacekeeping had dropped by 40 per cent, to 516 personnel, which reflected more a winding down of the missions in Bosnia, Kosovo, East Timor and along the Iraq–Kuwait border than a radical shift in policy.

### *Bush Leading and Participating*

However, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld tried to reduce US military participation in peace operations prior to the terror attacks of 11 September 2001. He called for US troops to pull out of the MFO mission, but was initially blocked by the White House. Pressured by European allies and recognizing political realities in the field, the Bush administration agreed only to a modest force reduction for Bosnia in late May 2001 and left Kosovo troop levels as they were for the time being.<sup>30</sup> More remarkably, a few months later, Bush authorized US troops to participate in Operation *Essential Harvest* with other NATO soldiers in 'an effort to disarm ethnic Albanian guerrillas in Macedonia'.<sup>31</sup> Proponents of US engagement were relieved in early 2001 when Bush retreated from the campaign pledge to work swiftly towards a reduction and accelerated withdrawal from the Balkans.

Nonetheless, the first months of the Bush administration seemed to confirm the pre-election expectations that Bush and his team would not encourage the use of UN peace operations as a response to international crises. Public statements and rhetoric from Bush and his top advisers raised the prospect that the United States would be a passive, uninvolved power on peacekeeping issues, or would discourage new operations. Nor would it contribute front-line ground troops to UN missions except in special circumstances. The overall level of policy support at the UN was also reflected in the fact that whereas Albright and

Holbrooke held cabinet-level status, the Bush administration did not offer equivalent rank to its UN Permanent Representatives. Other organizational changes were read as an ideological shift, such as the renaming of the Department of Defense office responsible for peace operations as 'Stability Operations', and the disbanding of the interagency Peacekeeping Core Group, which coordinated policy through the National Security Council. The Clinton administration PDDs addressing aspects of peace operations were not revised or reissued.

Further, official disinterest in peacekeeping was demonstrated by the Defense Department's plan to close the Army War College's small Peacekeeping Institute, a centre created in the 1990s to help develop military doctrine, provide leadership training, and convene civilian and military participants to consider lessons learned in the field. Questioning the rationale that its closure was to save money, supporters on Capitol Hill and elsewhere urged that it stay open during an era of 9/11, Afghanistan and then Iraq. At the last minute, the administration reinstated the institute in late 2003 – after the majority of its staff had left and a plaque was mounted commemorating the institute's short life.

### *9/11 and Afghanistan*

The events of 11 September 2001 began a fundamental shift in the administration's foreign policy, including a turn to the UN as a vehicle for responding to the attacks by al-Qaeda and for gathering support for US military action against the Taliban in Afghanistan. Soon after the terror attacks, the Bush administration established the culpability of Taliban-ruled Afghanistan in providing sanctuary and support to the al-Qaeda leadership. President Bush addressed the UN to pledge cooperation and to work with the UN on a combined military and political approach to Afghanistan. The United States also moved to pay off its final arrears to the UN and announced that it would rejoin UNESCO.

In November 2001, Bush laid out the concept to the General Assembly of a US-led effort both to rid Afghanistan of terrorist forces and to support the reconstruction and governance of the country. He promised that:

America will join the world in helping the people of Afghanistan rebuild their country... the United States will work closely with the United Nations and development banks to reconstruct Afghanistan after hostilities there have ceased and the Taliban are no longer in control. And the United States will work with the UN to support a post-Taliban government that represents all of the Afghan people.<sup>32</sup>

After the fall of the Taliban government and while coalition forces pursued al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters, the United States supported UN authorization of a multinational coalition to provide security in Kabul – the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The UN was called upon to fulfil a substantial role in the political process, but security in Kabul and its surrounding areas was the role of ISAF's 5,000 troops. That force was initially operational only in Kabul, despite the insecurity throughout the country. The United States did not want ISAF's troops to move beyond Kabul to where US forces were engaged in hunting

down remnants of the old regime. But insecurity grew throughout the country, and, finally, the role of ISAF extended beyond Kabul.

The Bush administration shifted from treating nation-building and stability operations as electives that did not serve national security interests, to the view embodied in the 'National Security Strategy of 2002', which stated dramatically, 'America is now threatened less by conquering states than we are by failing ones.'<sup>33</sup> In introducing the strategy, President Bush argued: 'The events of September 11, 2001, taught us that weak states, like Afghanistan, can pose as great a danger to our national interests as strong states. Poverty does not make poor people into terrorists and murderers. Yet, poverty, weak institutions, and corruption can make weak states vulnerable to terrorist networks and drug cartels within their borders.'<sup>34</sup> This shift in thinking led the Bush administration to work more closely with the UN and heralded recognition of its role in peace operations.

The change during 2001–02 was not seamless. In the summer of 2002, for example, the United States opposed expanding or renewing any UN peacekeeping mandates until the Security Council voted to give immunity to US personnel from the ICC.<sup>35</sup> Although the authority of the Security Council to provide such immunity was in doubt (as was any threat to US military personnel in UN operations), the United States demonstrated its willingness to put UN peacekeeping on hold when political disputes called for it to take a back seat to other interests.

A year later, Bush again addressed the General Assembly, this time arguing that Iraq was a threat. He made no argument for nation-building, however, despite the fact that the United States was (unknowingly) about to embark on its most ambitious effort to do just that.

### *Towards Pragmatic Support*

The US support of UN peacekeeping missions mainly endured despite the tensions stemming from the Iraq debate at the UN. Indeed, by 2003, a new wave of UN-led missions was being approved. The United States supported an expansion of the MONUC operation in the DRC in early December 2002, voted for new UN operations in Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire in 2003, and sought Security Council action to stem the growing chaos in Haiti in 2004.

Critics of UN peace operations and nation-building tended to view them as liberal adventures, rather than serious tools to support US humanitarian and national security interests. After 9/11, however, that view was less represented within the Bush administration. For example, Kim Holmes, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, demonstrated this shift in his public statements.<sup>36</sup> Holmes focused on what went right in UN operations such as Timor-Leste; on the UN's authorizing operations by lead nations in the DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, and Iraq; and on completing or winding down missions in the Balkans and Sierra Leone:

The bottom line is that we recognize that neither the United States, with all its wealth and military power, nor the United Nations with its universal membership can solve the world's problems alone. . . . Working within the

UN system helps us better leverage our political, financial, and military capabilities, so as to be ready to respond to any new challenges that arise.<sup>37</sup>

The Bush administration voted for more UN peacekeeping missions in Burundi, Haiti and Sudan in 2004–05, operations that marked the continued shift from traditional, Chapter VI missions toward complex, Chapter VII operations that drew the UN into more expansive, operational roles (e.g., security sector reform, civilian policing, peacebuilding) in environments where consent of the parties remained partial and peacekeepers had authorization to use force to uphold their mandates. Finally, the United States consistently argued for efforts to implement elements of the broad reform agenda laid out in the Brahimi Report.<sup>38</sup>

The United States strongly supported the UN mission in southern Sudan and the African Union (AU) deployment to Darfur in 2004. The United States funded the AU troops, contracting out provisions for their field camps and helping a UN team working with the AU to develop its plans.<sup>39</sup> More broadly, the United States kept world attention on the crisis and worked with other donor nations to organize financial and material support for the AU, culminating in strong pressure to transform the AU force in Darfur to a hybrid AU–UN force to be led by the UN in 2007.<sup>40</sup> While the 2001 terror attacks softened traditional Republican and conservative scepticism vis-à-vis peace operations, the attacks also ensured that US support for them would remain primarily political, financial and logistical as the military turned its full attention to the war on terror.

### *Funding for UN Peace Operations*

When considering new or expanded UN missions, the Bush administration still needed congressional support. Unlike during the Clinton administration, the Republican-led Congress was less critical of funding requests from the Bush administration and inclined to support the president's agenda. Yet the State Department faced challenges in presenting its budget needs and gaining congressional support prior to the United States voting for a new or expanded UN mission – even if the operations did not involve US troops – and this required policymakers to claim national security relevance.

A culture of restraint within the administration also limited more US support for longer-term strategies, investments in capacity building or improving UN effectiveness. The United States preferred to offset its assessment of a new UN operation with reductions elsewhere in the US account for peacekeeping.<sup>41</sup> When the supporting reform measures cost money – such as developing Strategic Deployment Stocks at the UN Logistics Base in Brindisi, Italy, in 2002–03 – the United States urged the reallocation of unspent UN funds rather than an appeal for 'new' funding.

Even with less political resistance to UN missions, State Department budget requests to Congress for assessed payments for UN peacekeeping operations were routinely held to the minimum costs for current and future operations, even in times of anticipated growth. In 2003, for example, the administration asked for less funding for the coming year (fiscal year 2004) than for the two

previous years. While this request partly mirrored reductions in UN peacekeepers in the Balkans, East Timor and Sierra Leone, the budget request presumed reductions in the UN mission to the DRC and made no allowances for any new or expanded operations in Africa (or elsewhere). Nor did it provide a cushion to support improved UN capacities to plan, organize and manage such operations. By the time Congress acted to appropriate funding for the fiscal year (FY) 2004 budget, however, much had changed: a new, robust UN peace operation was approved for Liberia in September 2003 (SCR 1509), and Congress provided funds, though without covering the on-the-horizon missions in the Sudan and Burundi, or the anticipated UN takeover of operations in Côte d'Ivoire in April 2004 and Haiti in June 2004.

Yet, by 2006, the Bush administration had gained relatively consistent support from Congress for funding UN peace operations. Some gaps remained – new US arrears were growing due to a congressional cap on paying no more than 25 per cent of UN peacekeeping costs. Congress also had heated exchanges over conditioning US funding to the UN, due to outrage over the lack of UN authorization over Iraq, the 'oil-for-food' scandal, and reports of abuse by UN peacekeepers in the field. Moreover, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) regularly cut the amount requested internally by the State Department for its annual Contributions for International Peacekeeping (CIPA) budgets. While this was a normal budget versus policymaker tussle, some senior OMB officials were known to be quite critical of the UN and peacekeeping operations. Fundamentally, however, the administration had moved to embrace UN peace operations as a useful tool. Congress followed without great complaint.

## Challenges

The United States has not achieved a clear strategic accord or bipartisan consensus on its role in the world since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The Bush administration has defined US interests within the war on terror framework, which has led, perhaps surprisingly, to a role for peace operations in helping stabilize regions, in strengthening democracy, and in reducing susceptible havens for terrorists. It is not clear whether another, competing strategic framework will be offered by the next president and administration, and if so, what vision of peace operations would follow. Until then, there is an uneasy domestic consensus that the UN serves US interests, not as a centrepiece of policy but as one tool among many, meeting both humanitarian and security goals.

Even with this consensus, US policy still sends mixed messages. For example, the United States has been more cooperative on peace operations, even after the invasion of Iraq in 2003, than many anticipated. Bush discovered, like many previous presidents, that peace operations serve national security more often than not and at less cost than commonly available alternatives. Yet scepticism of UN-based multilateralism remains high in Washington, alongside the long-standing allergy to contributing troops to any multilateral command structure that does not have a US officer at the top. Thus, US support for considering a UN peace operation continues, albeit for crises of secondary importance.

Both the Clinton and Bush administrations faced challenges to their policies and views of peace operations. Under Clinton, enthusiasm shifted from early optimism to a cautious assessment of each operation on a case-by-case basis. Critics of this policy of basic support for UN peacekeeping hit the Clinton administration hard for both too little and too much US engagement. Equally striking, the Bush administration shifted from outright criticism of Clinton era operations and opposition to 'nation-building' to support for the greatest expansion in the number, size and complexity of UN peace operations since the UN's founding. Driven by US interests in stability in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush administration sought to recruit other nations to help provide security and peacebuilding in areas of clear US interests, such as in the Balkans (to allow the United States to withdraw troops), Afghanistan (to support ISAF without US personnel), Haiti (where a US-led intervention in 2004 was handed over to the UN), and Somalia, Sudan and Iraq. At the same time, the administration has supported UN missions across Africa, Nepal, Timor-Leste and Lebanon. This embrace reflects the transformation of a conservative administration highly sceptical of multinational engagement to an administration that has come to embrace nation-building as a way to serve national security.

Emerging from the struggles of the 1990s and the peacekeeping surge from 1999 to 2007, US policy now reflects a general view that the UN plays a valuable role and serves US interests through leadership of peace operations. US policy has demonstrated some flexibility and quiet support despite budgetary constraints imposed by Congress. Ideological differences, however, could easily reappear and affect the next administration of either party. The United States will certainly face a basic decision about whether to take the lead in enhancing international capacity for peace operations or to stand back. The United States can muster sophisticated and unparalleled resources to respond effectively to a crisis when it has the political will (e.g., Afghanistan, Iraq), but stronger and more sustained support for peace operations has not been a priority of recent presidents. Eager to hand over commitments in Afghanistan and Iraq, the United States faces the stark reality that the UN cannot recruit enough skilled personnel to replace the multinational forces currently deployed there. Further, the UN is overloaded with new operations and insufficient levels of available, skilled personnel who can rapidly deploy. Given US prudence on this issue, early signs point to a continuation of quiet but modest support and a pragmatic approach to UN operations. But that approach will leave doubts about the US commitment to back the UN – even in hard places such as Sudan and Iraq – just in time for a new administration to grapple with the surge in such UN missions worldwide.

#### NOTES

1. This essay follows the definitions of the report of the August 2000 UN Panel on Peace Operations and the US Department of Defense (DoD). The former defined peace operations as encompassing conflict prevention and peacemaking through diplomacy, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. The latter defines peacekeeping as '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 solution'. Peace enforcement is defined as the

'application of military force or threat of its use, normally pursuant to international authorization, to compel compliance with resolutions or sanctions designed to maintain or restore peace and order'. Peacebuilding is defined as 'post conflict actions, predominately diplomatic and economic, that strengthen and rebuild governmental infrastructure and institutions in order to avoid a relapse into conflict'. The August 2000 report of the UN Panel on Peace Operations (the 'Brahimi Report'), see UN doc. A/55/305, paras10–14; US DoD, *Joint Publication 3–07* updated by JP 3–0, *Joint Operations*, 17 Sept. 2006 (at: [www.dtic.mil/doctrine/fel/doddict](http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/fel/doddict)).

2. This essay excludes peace operations led primarily as campaigns, in coalition, or by regional organizations such as NATO.
3. Bush announced his intention to increase US planning and training for peacekeeping operations in a speech to the UN General Assembly, 'Address by the President of the United States of America to the 47th Session of the UN General Assembly', 21 Sept. 1992, US–UN press release 84–(92).
4. The UN had only led 13 peacekeeping operations prior to 1989. In 1991, the UN had eight missions with about 10,000 personnel (US\$0.4 billion); by 1993, it led 17 missions with a total strength of about 78,000 personnel (\$3.6 billion). 'United Nations Military, Police Deployment Reaches All-Time High in October', press release PKO/152, 10 Nov. 2006 (at: [www.un.org/Dept/dpko/chart.pdf](http://www.un.org/Dept/dpko/chart.pdf)).
5. See Permanent Representative to the UN Madeleine K. Albright, 'Statement before the Subcommittee on International Security, International Organisations and Human Rights on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs', 24 June 1993. The origins of this attitude to multilateral organizations are usually traced to Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign to criticize the incumbent Bush senior's policies in the Balkans and elsewhere. See Michael G. MacKinnon, *The Evolution of US Peacekeeping Policy Under Clinton: A Fairweather Friend?*, London: Frank Cass, 2000, pp.19–20.
6. For more on the domestic politics shaping policy during the first Clinton administration, see MacKinnon, *ibid.*; Ivo H. Daalder, 'Knowing When to Say No: The Development of US Policy for Peacekeeping', in William J. Durch (ed.), *UN Peacekeeping, American Policy, and the Uncivil Wars of the 1990s*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996, ch.2; Sarah Sewall, 'Multilateral Peace Operations', in Stewart Patrick and Shepard Forman (eds.), *Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy: Ambivalent Engagement*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2002, pp.191–224; Ramesh Thakur, 'UN Peace Operations and US Unilateralism and Multilateralism', in David Malone and Yuen Foong Khong (eds.), *Multilateralism and US Foreign Policy: International Perspectives*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003, pp.153–79; Victoria K. Holt, *Briefing Book on Peacekeeping: The US Role in United Nations Peace Operations*, Washington, DC: Council for a Livable World Education Fund, Dec. 1994; Edward M. Spiers, 'US Peace Operations: The Transition Continues', in Rachel E. Utley (ed.), *Major Powers and Peacekeeping: Perspectives, Priorities and the Challenges of Military Intervention*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, pp.15–29.
7. See White House, *U.S. Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations*, US Department of State, Publication 10161, 4 May 1994.
8. See Samantha Power, *A Problem From Hell: America and the Age of Genocide*, New York: Basic Books, 2002, ch.10; Organization of African Unity, *Rwanda: The Preventable Genocide*, Report of the International Panel of Eminent Personalities to Investigate the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda and Surrounding Events (at: [www.oau-oua.org/Document/ipep/ipep.htm](http://www.oau-oua.org/Document/ipep/ipep.htm)), 29 May 2000; Human Rights Watch, *Leave None to Tell the Story: Genocide in Rwanda*, New York: 1999, pp.595–690; Linda R. Melvern, *A People Betrayed: The Role of the West in Rwanda's Genocide*, London: Zed Books, 2000.
9. The Clinton administration supported the UN's substitution for a French-led force in the Central African Republic, but influential members in Congress warned the administration of their opposition in advance, and Congress never authorized US payments for a UN mission.
10. The Helms–Biden deal took many years until it won approval in 2000, and three more years to implement a series of payments to the UN for past arrears. Congress delayed approval in a fight with the White House over US funds allocated to international family-planning initiatives.
11. By late 2000, Holbrooke won a reduced US assessment rate for peacekeeping that would progressively fall from under 28 per cent to just above 25 per cent, which Helms accepted in January 2001.
12. Gregg chaired the Senate Appropriations Commerce, Justice, State and Judiciary Subcommittee, which oversaw UN peacekeeping funds. A 'hold' is an informal tool used to demonstrate disagreement and urge negotiation, which the State Department recognized for months in an effort to win over Gregg's support. Gregg was concerned that the Lomé Agreement for Sierra Leone gave too much credibility to the RUF rebels, proposed robust forces for that country, and was sceptical of their success if deployed under UN command and control.

13. The UK maintained an assault force in Sierra Leone that contributed to beating back the RUF and restoring a level of security first around Freetown and then later in the rest of the country. The bulk of British force, however, was deployed under British command and was not part of UNAMSIL's command structure, to the irritation of the UN force contributors such as Jordan.
14. See *UN Security Council Resolution 1291*, 24 Feb. 2000, for details on the strength and mandate of the UN mission in the DRC, which by 2007 had more than 17,000 personnel.
15. Interviews conducted by MacKinnon in New York, 2000–01.
16. Interview with MacKinnon, New York, May 2000.
17. See Dan Balz, 'Bush Rejects Isolationism in Foreign Policy Outline', *International Herald Tribune*, 20 Nov. 1999.
18. See 'The Second 2000 Gore–Bush Presidential Debate: October 11, 2000' (at: [www.debates.org/pages/trans2000b.html](http://www.debates.org/pages/trans2000b.html)).
19. For more analysis on this point, see Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2003, p.37.
20. See 'A Question of Leadership', *Washington Post*, reprinted in *International Herald Tribune*, 2 Sept. 2000.
21. Ibid.
22. Cokie Roberts and Sam Donaldson, 'Interview with George W. Bush', *This Week* (ABC News), 23 Jan. 2000.
23. Bush appointees held divergent views, from strong sceptics of peacekeeping and the UN (e.g., Cheney) to those who saw both as useful tools (e.g., Colin Powell).
24. See Daalder and Lindsay (n.20 above); Barbara Crossette, 'US Pushes to Weaken World Court on Atrocities', *New York Times*, 12 June 2000.
25. See Peter M. Swartz and Edsel D. McGrady, *A Deep Legacy: Smaller-Scale Contingencies and the Forces That Shape the Navy*, CRM 98–95.10, Center for Naval Analyses, Alexandria, VA: 1998.
26. Field Manual, *FM 100–23 Peace Operations*, US Army Headquarters, p. v, Dec. 1994.
27. William Schneider, 'Not Exactly a Bush Flip-Flop', *National Journal*, 27 Oct. 2001.
28. US Department of Defense Active Duty Military Personnel Strength by Regional Area and Country (309A), as of 31 Dec. 2000 (at: <http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/M05/hst1200.pdf>).
29. UN data for January 2001 (at: [www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/index.htm](http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/contributors/index.htm)). US civilian police are contracted through the State Department.
30. The United States was reluctant to put troops under NATO command as well, claiming after the KFOR experience that it needed a free hand in conducting the 'war on terror'. See Steven Erlanger, 'Europeans Say Bush's Pledge to Pull Out of Balkans Could Split NATO', *New York Times*, 25 Oct. 2000; Erlanger and Michael R. Gordon, 'Allies, Questioning Bush Stand, Say US Kosovo Role Is Crucial', *New York Times*, 16 Jan. 2001; Keith B. Richburg, 'Rumsfeld Worries Europeans on Bosnia; Allies Warn US Against Withdrawal', *Washington Post*, 23 May 2001; Michael R. Gordon, 'NATO Plans Only Modest Bosnia Cutback', *New York Times*, 27 May 2001.
31. See Andrew J. Bacevich, *American Empire: The Realities and Consequences of US Diplomacy*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002, p.209.
32. Remarks to the UN General Assembly, 10 Nov. 2001 (at: [www.un.org/webcast/ga/56/statements/011110usaE.htm](http://www.un.org/webcast/ga/56/statements/011110usaE.htm)).
33. The White House, 'National Security Strategy', Sept. 2002 (at: [www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.pdf)).
34. Ibid. US opposition to a large peace operation beyond Kabul was rooted in several factors, including fear of antagonizing 'Afghanistan's legendary xenophobia' by having foreign troops conducting high-profile patrols and the costs of a countrywide operation requiring airlift resources because of the poor infrastructure in the country. James Dobbins, John G. McGinn, Keith Crane, Seth G. Jones, Rollie Lal, Andrew Rathmell, Rachel M. Swanger and Anga R. Timilsina, *America's Role in Nation-Building: From Germany to Iraq*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2003, ch.8.
35. The United States argued that its personnel were at risk from the ICC and threatened to withdraw from all UN-led peace operations. A reduction in its military observers in East Timor from three to two was framed as a reaction to the lack of US safeguards against the ICC. Nearly all US personnel were serving as police in Kosovo (474), with only a handful elsewhere.
36. Holmes, a political appointee, had previously served in the Heritage Foundation.
37. 'The US Role in the United Nations', remarks by Kim R. Holmes, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs, before the Defense Orientation Conference Association, Burke, VA, 31 Oct. 2003.



38. For peacekeeping reforms, see Brahimi Report (n.2 above); William J. Durch, Victoria K. Holt, Caroline R. Earle and Moira K. Shanahan, *The Brahimi Report and the Future of Peace Operations*, Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 2003.
39. US bilateral training assistance had also been provided to some African contingents through the African Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program, annually funded at US\$10–20 million.
40. The adoption of Security Council resolution 1769 on 31 July 2007 calling for the deployment of a joint AU–UN force to Darfur can be seen as a qualified success for US policy and diplomacy and an indication of the continued support for UN operations within the Bush administration.
41. The Clinton administration had urged a policy of zero-growth budgets for the UN Regular Budget, which funded the activities of the institution beyond peacekeeping, an idea that was thus familiar to Congress.