

I leave the United Nations today after a second and unexpected career of fourteen and a half fascinating years in Peacekeeping. I left the United Kingdom diplomatic service in order to 'do something different'. And different it has been.

The most obvious and most important difference is of course the mix of nationality, culture and ethnicity in the UN, compared to any National Civil Service. 25 years in the UK Service was 25 years in the familiarity of home interspersed with years spent abroad, but within the cocoon of a working environment largely made up of fellow countrymen and women. One flag, familiar habits, and a single working and management culture accepted by all. How comfortable it was.

From this I voluntarily parachuted into UNPROFOR in July 1995. UNPROFOR was in many ways peacekeeping at its worst.

The Balkans. First and worst encounter.

UNPROFOR was badly led, with an impossible mandate, lacking consistent support from the International Community, and facing life and death problems on a daily basis, while ill equipped to respond to them. The Srebrenica massacre happened two weeks after my arrival as Political Affairs Head, and I witnessed in my first two weeks an amateur, confused and self important civilian leadership, with a poor chain of command to Headquarters, failing time and again to meet even the most modest expectations of the frustrated largely professional and increasingly embittered and disloyal, Military Command, and some hard working and well informed civilian field staff. Ironically perhaps it was the UN military leadership, which when asked by history to step up to the plate, doomed the people of Srebrenica thus augmenting a level of instability in the whole of the former Yugoslavia which lasts to this day

The leadership of UNPROFOR, arguably the most important Peacekeeping Mission in the history of the UN until that time, was characterized by all the seven deadly sins elegantly identified by Lakhdar Brahimi (some years later) as having fatal consequences for a peace process: ignorance; arrogance; partiality; impotence; haste; inflexibility; and false promises.

As Kofi Annan wrote later;

"Through error, misjudgment and an inability to recognize the scope of the evil confronting us, we failed to do our part to save the people of Srebrenica from mass murder."

It was in Zagreb at that time that it first became clear to me and others that this had been a collective failure of the International System, and that if UN Peacekeeping were to survive, gain respectability and become an effective instrument for meeting serious challenges to International Peace and Security then the Secretariat, the Security Council and Member States would need to focus on providing the right mandates, the right means, and the right level of political support to Peace Operations Above all, they needed all to learn that peace could be kept only when it was there to keep.

Yasushi Akashi, who had been chosen to lead the UN's massive European intervention, following a relative success in Cambodia, was replaced late in 1995 by Kofi Annan, but not before a triumphant farewell tour to a number of visibly puzzled European capitals in his ageing Soviet built UN executive jet. Many of these same capitals had heaved a sigh of relief at the news of his departure.

I worked for Kofi Annan as his Political and Civil Affairs head in his brief spell in Europe. Some said he had been exiled by Boutros Boutros Ghali in an attempt to remove him from the New York limelight, ahead of a bitter SG selection/reselection process. I remember few if any such pleasant and rewarding experiences in my career. Annan was an inspiring beacon in a sea of depression and doubt. A man who encouraged consensus through strength of conviction. A gentleman.

.....*and then to the White City*

My first stint in Belgrade followed, at Kofi Annan's request. The first of three such appointments, as it turned out, and the most interesting and challenging among them. I watched and commented on the beginnings of the epic struggle of the Serbs to rid themselves of Slobodan Milosevic, who had attempted simultaneously to hijack both the Serbian nation *and* the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and in so doing had destroyed much of the structure (and many would say the soul) of both.

I met and dealt with Milosevic alone and in company. Like many of his ilk, he had a superficial charm, and he managed to deceive a number of people in international public life into believing that he was a man who could be dealt with, a man who could see reason and could deliver. In truth, he was none of these things. He was a small man in every way. He was truly amoral: A man for whom the ends would always justify the means. Milosevic was like a man who sets fire to his neighbour's house and then claims some credit for helping to put out the blaze. The constant attention from the International

Community and its leading players, gave him the oxygen to continue. I regret now having provided some of that oxygen, and not being more successful persuading others that isolation would have been wiser than inclusion. When he died an appropriately unheroic death in The Hague I did not mourn for him, but mourned instead for the dead of Yugoslavia, for even in this small and pathetic demise he had cheated them all one final time.

In 1996, the UN Office in Belgrade had amongst its tasks the support of the UN operation in Eastern Slavonia (UNTAES). Under the larger-than-life leadership of Jacques Klein, a US Military Officer and Diplomat, the UN had that elusive but vital mix of the right mandate, the right means, and an achievable timeframe, and produced a success story that is now half forgotten. We were to meet again in less happy circumstances later in Bosnia and Herzegovina where I served as his Deputy.

Haiti. Troubled beauty

A call from New York in the middle of the night, (from Iqbal Rizza, Chief of Staff to SG Annan who was rarely attentive to time zones) sent me off as SRSG to Haiti: then a small police training mission, with an interesting 'good offices' role. Two amazing years in that beautiful but tragic place taught me more about the art of peacekeeping and about the organization and structure of the UN.

Perhaps the most important lesson I took home from Haiti was that the United Nations should spend more time and resources on preparation -- before it embarks upon new missions. Time spent on reconnaissance is never time wasted, they say in the military. In Haiti we mounted a police mission and diligently set about creating a new police force for a country, but with almost no local knowledge. We created a Police Service, based on Canadian models of community policing and the French gendarmerie, without stopping even for five minutes to look at the history and sociology of policing in Haiti or to ask the people of Haiti what kind of police they themselves wanted. Had we done so, we would certainly have found great differences between the towns and the countryside. We would have found in the countryside a tradition of community policing and community law that already went back two centuries. "Watch Committees," unpopular in other settings, were respected. In town, on the other hand, we would have found acceptance that forceful policing was both necessary and desirable.

Our police service measured by our own standards was a success. When most needed a few years after my departure, it faltered, and many officers were killed. The process then had to be started all over again.

Following two U.S. armed interventions in the last twenty years, five separate peacekeeping missions, and billions of dollars in foreign aid, Haiti nevertheless remains a country with some of the worst endemic human problems in the world. It continues to be the site of too many “feel-good” projects draped in national flags, which change the basic facts of this place little or not at all.

Haiti’s erstwhile partners pay insufficient attention to governance, anti-corruption, and building up legitimacy of the government. There are repetitive sterile debates about “which comes first?” – security or development. Compounding this record, geography has in the last year put Haiti in the eye of four successive natural disasters, which may put back thoughts of real change for another generation. For all this, though, over the long-term political “*Haiti Fatigue*”^{*} may prove more devastating to the country’s future than the natural disasters. This is a kind of problem I would later wrestle with in East Timor.

The present Mission in Haiti, which is better prepared, and with a much wider mandate, is doing good things under experienced leadership. But Haiti is seriously broken, and will need enormous financial and political will to fix. Trusteeship for a twenty year period is but one option that could make sufficient impact. But there is no stomach for assistance on this scale, and so Haiti will likely continue its roller coaster ride to further disasters, and receiving more first aid, while its endemic problems are left alone. The most fundamental is Haiti’s small corrupt political class which feels no sense of responsibility toward the Haitian people. None at all. The international community will most probably once again encourage “winner takes all” elections and then mainly leave Haiti again to its apparently impoverished fate

Back to the Balkans

From Haiti, I went back to the Balkans, as SRSG Jacques Klein’s Deputy in Sarajevo. UNMIBH was a Mission with a specific, but again hastily thought out, mandate (limited to police) operating as a poor cousin to the two leading international presences NATO and the specially created “Office of the High Representative” (OHR). By temperament, Klein was not cut out to play third violin. His qualities were appropriate for particular circumstances, and in the Sarajevo role, he appeared to be a blustery narcissistic Emperor without clothes, and he anyway had almost no interest in police work. Serious problems such as sexual abuse and trafficking, in which some UN Police were distressingly

^{*} Robert Zoellig, Jan 2009

implicated, were left unattended (some even said, in dismissive response, that we should all understand that “boys will be boys”) until the point when further failure to address them would have resulted in public censure. Meanwhile, several non mandated tasks were pursued with single minded vigour from a grandiose new UN Headquarters, budgeted for with sleight of hand worthy of Little Dorrit.

UNMIBH was a new iteration of the worst of the old DPKO Administration. The institutional abuse of power by administrators was the hallmark, using a system based on non-transparency, flawed performance reporting, and short term contracts which offered even low level managers absolute power over junior staff. More broadly, DPKO’s management system and its team of senior administrators had grown so quickly that abuse and a lack of transparency had become the ways of life.

The leadership of the Department and the leadership in Missions were cushioned from endemic nastiness by a conspiracy of comforting daily noise, which sat just fine with a nearly universal lack of inquisitiveness. It was, to choose the word carefully, shameful. Administrative leadership, with no moral compass, easily relied upon threats and career uncertainty to its own advantage, and prospered.

After two years Klein was rid of his gadfly Deputy. He then had the only Deputy he had ever really wanted: his Director of Administration.

Another troubled tropical Isle

I was asked to go instead to East Timor to help to design the mandate and shape of the successor Mission to Sergio Vieira de Mello’s UNTAET.

It was a privilege to head the small transition team in Dili and New York.(2002) It may have been the first time that the Secretariat had ever sent a senior DPKO official to manage a field transition process.

De Mello had done an extraordinary job in East Timor. He had plenipotentiary power to bring the devastated small territory to independence, in a matter of months. He had faced the reality of no viable civil service, no military, no police service, and a barebones infrastructure that had largely been destroyed.

On arrival I found that much had been achieved and that de Mello’s status was extraordinary with the people of East Timor. His wise use of a mixture of democratic consultation and force of personality reminded me of another larger than life character in Far Eastern fable, a certain James Brooke, who with an agreement drawn up, signed and sealed, guns fired and flags waved, on September 24, 1841, became “Rajah Brooke of

Sarawak.” In August of the following year the hereditary Rajah solemnly confirmed the agreement as ‘the will of my people.’”

The 21st century ‘Rajah’ had done his best with generous resources and a strong mandate, but it was also clear that much more needed to be done following elections and the rebirth of the recognised new state of Timor Leste. What was equally clear in Washington and in Canberra (the new “Deputy Sheriff of the Pacific”) was that both the US and Australia had decided that enough had already been spent, and that a drastic reduction in the UN presence, military, Police, and civilian was in order. Peacebuilding and nation building could be carried forth with only minimum involvement of the Security Council, and its assessed contribution funding mechanism. The spotlight moved away from the fragile construct of the new State.

My task there was to deliver a plan for a new Mission that would succeed the De Mello Trusteeship, and be sufficiently robust and technically competent to underpin independence.

On visits to Washington and Canberra, as an official of the United Nations I was subjected to threats and bullying that went far beyond the diplomatic norm, but still in the end we were able to persuade the whole of the Council (for the first time) to include from assessed contributions a 200-strong cadre of essential technical experts, as well as the first UN executive police force in a new independent State.

Not for the first time in my diplomatic life I was amazed by the level of shortsightedness and wishful thinking of high level policymakers in the world’s power centres. Despite the best efforts of the UN, which practically could never be enough, the eruption of conflict in April 2006 exposed the misjudgment of those who had earlier claimed to be securing Timor Leste’s best interest. I was able to indulge in some *Schadenfreude* while watching the rapid and very expensive deployment of Australian troops, 650 of whom remain stationed on the island to this day.

An unexpected call to Headquarters

During this same time a novelesque series of events was unfolding in UN Headquarters surrounding hidden, or missing, video tape evidence in the case of Israeli soldiers captured in Lebanon. One of the outcomes was an unplanned sideways movement of the Director of Peacekeeping for Asia and the Middle East to the European directorate. This ill wind took me back to New York for over two years to serve as Acting Director for Asia and the Middle East (and a personal battle, won, against colon cancer).

This was a period in Peacekeeping management characterized by much introspection, and a Cartesian intellectual quest for “truth” concerning our operations. Too easy to dismiss as ‘management by monologue’, this was a time when a solid theoretical foundation was being laid for some changes that are still being made, including to give Peacekeeping some basic doctrine, as well as a defined, practical and widely accepted philosophy. While this was going on, and as Lakhdar Brahimi and other more ephemeral luminaries dominated the public scene, the day to day work of Peacekeeping was getting busier, and also more desperate for resources. Those of us more in tune by inclination with Hobbes and Locke were dealing with an ever expanding commitment in Africa, and in planning for Afghanistan and Iraq.

I took great professional satisfaction managing the successful closure of one major operation. UNIKOM, perched precariously on the border between Kuwait and Iraq since the 1991 Gulf War, had to be closed and evacuated in time for the US and its allies to thunder across the berm at the beginning of another one. Excellent team work between the mission administration, the Force Commander (currently the somewhat surprised head of the Polish Armed Forces), and an excellent desk in UN Headquarters resulted in the last UNMO’s and staff members leaving the danger zone only hours before the Allied advance. (UK paratroopers then wantonly laid waste to our excellent Mission Headquarters facility on their way North.....) .

The dramas in Iraq, including the tragic bombing of the UN Headquarters in Baghdad in 2003, meant that I was involved in regular meetings at the highest level in New York. The experience was both stimulating at times, and disappointing at others.

My overriding impression was one of too much individual personality and not enough teamwork at the top of an organization, which was once again, involved in life and death decisions. The leadership of the UN, in conclave, made political and moral compromises and sought decision by consensus immediately following the Baghdad HQ attack. Some of these decisions put hundreds of UN staff at great risk in Iraq and Jordan, with no clear logical argument having been articulated concerning the need for them to remain at all. The organization was, in my view, only lucky that its enemies were less active than they might have been.

A more hopeful and wiser Belgrade

My stay in New York came to an end in 2003, and I was returned to the Balkans and the Office in Belgrade.

This time, Kosovo was at the top of the UN agenda, and the pieces left behind by the 1999 NATO air campaign were being picked up and regularly dropped by the Europeans and the US.

A significant strategic objective had been set forth right at the beginning of the NATO intervention: namely, to integrate Kosovo into a functional regional community (including Serbia and Albania); a community that would promote efficiency in development funding, create the foundation for political cooperation, and provide regional states with a realistic road map to EU integration. These lofty but important objectives, set in the world political context of late 1999, were receiving much shorter shrift in early 2006.

The prevailing wind in Brussels had now set against any major project or initiative which might risk further alienation of the people from the European Idea. While still claiming to develop policies that would be more “inclusive,” and to involve the citizens of Europe more directly, in practice the EU apparatus had come closer to a standstill. Thus in Kosovo the EU was as much or more reluctant to take on the role of “administrator” as had been the UN in the spring of 1999.

The last year of that Belgrade stay was made up of a large amount of effort in support of the Ahtisaari process, intended to address with more finality the Kosovo problem by reaching an understanding which would entail the end of Security Council tutelage and encourage a graceful hand off to the EU. However, this was a flawed political process from the start, with one party being given a “private message” that it need not negotiate and the other a "private message" that independence was already a done deal internationally. I can remember no process of negotiation in my own career that involved such relentless pounding at a square peg to fit a round hole. The fundamental lack of good faith in the Ahtisaari process doomed it from the outset, it was an awkward (if often gustatorially satisfying) quickstep danced in the gilded ballrooms of Vienna, with a crescendo in the red brick simplicity of Oslo Town Hall. Much noise and pomp, hardly any substance. . Better outcomes could certainly have been achieved, but were not even attempted.

As ever, the UN could and should have done rather better in Kosovo, but compromises contained in the Security Council Resolution, and the arrival of the first UN personnel on the ground coinciding with the mass exodus and harassment of the Kosovo Albanian population by the Serbs, had resulted in a Mission that was, right from the start, significantly listing toward preparation of Kosovo Independence. Illusions of progress

were maintained through Reports to the Security Council which were often very economical with the truth. The clouded mirrors of a selection process on the 38th floor of the Secretariat cleared not once, but seven times, in seven years to reveal a new Administrator/SRSG. These came from a mixed bag of politicians and bureaucrats, only two had prior UN experience and none had any of Peacekeeping. Some inbuilt deficiencies of the UN system were thus, at the very least, exacerbated. Perhaps only one of these leaders took political engagement of Serbia seriously (then only under some duress) and sequentially they visited Serbia less and less, until finally such visits stopped altogether.

In its first seven years, UNMIK mainly avoided addressing fundamental political issues, which were nonetheless important if Kosovo were not to head relentlessly to becoming a mono-ethnic society. This seriously jeopardized the credibility of major international (especially 'Western') policies, not only in the Balkans, but elsewhere.

Like Webster's Dictionary. Morocco bound

Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon, by chance I am sure, made my move from Belgrade on to MINURSO in Western Sahara his first SRSG appointment. Thereby, in my second career, I reached the level of Assistant Secretary General. A level that I had certainly never expected to reach when I first joined UNPROFOR back in 1995.

My predecessor as SRSG MINURSO had written, in his End of Assignment Report, that his own predecessors had looked at the Mission like "someone looking through the window into a stranger's house." An appropriate phrase since he was preceded by three colleagues who had not served in a UN Mission before (despite, in one case, extensive UN experience.) Coming fresh from a senior appointment running Civil Affairs in Kosovo, my immediate predecessor's experience had been different, but his report, perhaps influenced by the (by then legendary) fictional nature of UNMIK Security Council reporting, dwelt little on important management issues of the Mission, and painted a rosier picture than was merited by the facts.

MINURSO already had developed a bad reputation. Fiction and fact had been blended into a scurrilous mix, which those in HQ nonetheless took some vicarious pleasure in recounting as truth. Though I found none of the fabled excesses of the past, I found plenty to confirm that they had indeed once existed.

MINURSO had earlier been the scene of excesses of behaviour which seem almost unbelievable in 2009. It had, at one time, a staff cafeteria with gambling machines that paid a percentage of gross to those whose good will was needed to install them. Local staff and women from town drank duty free liquor. And so on. Most of these more extreme excesses had already been stopped a few years prior to my arrival.

But much had not been changed. It was a very odd Cinderella in the Peacekeeping book of Grimm

Why after 17 years did UNMOs still have to venture outside the walls in some Team Sites to visit the toilet facilities? Why do we have no Legal agreement of any kind covering employment East of the sand berm. And many many more questions needed answers

But more fundamentally, why did the administration of the Mission still appear to exhibit the lack of transparency and implied threats which had characterised UN Mission management style over the years when New York had successfully reduced these problems elsewhere? Sadly, the answer I got was ‘because this is MINURSO.’

I had a blessing not long after I arrived with the addition of an extraordinarily competent and experienced Chief of Mission Support, uniquely up from the ranks of National Staff in UNDOF. MINURSO at least is now better managed, more efficient, more transparent, more caring. I left a team behind.

As for politics, Sahara is at the top of no one’s agenda. The International Community has become used to the *status quo*, and most are not unhappy with it. Africa has its eyes elsewhere. Morocco benefits from the support of two P5 members who, in publicly blessing the annexation and the autonomy plan (albeit with a nod toward mutual agreement), have ensured that the Kingdom attends most negotiations in the certain knowledge that it need only stress its determination to negotiate. Or at least if talks do break down, then Morocco will not be seen as the recalcitrant. Not the moral high ground, but high ground nonetheless.

Polisario for its part has been offering little new, rehearsing its arguments (with some skill) to a largely indifferent audience, save for the annual debates in the General Assembly and in the fora of Human Rights in Geneva. It has mostly failed to encourage any supporters to bring new life to the debate, except, for a few heady months, South Africa from its advantageous podium in the Security Council. Algeria remains steadfast, but not proactive.

Perhaps the most interesting political aspect of the problem is the attention it draws to the ability of the Permanent Members of the Security Council to indulge in cynicism which in most fora would be breathtaking. It is clear enough that negotiation will fail in any dispute if one side is told it need not negotiate. Kosovo, Western Sahara, or wherever. The delicious irony is that France the US and the UK have in these two cases of ‘self determination’ taken, and hold doggedly, to precisely opposite policies. Freedom for the Kosovars, at enormous cost (including it seems to for European credibility), on the one hand, and on the other, only autonomy for the Saharawi, at the cost to this small population of further years of isolation and privation in the desert.

My term in Western Sahara was curtailed in the same way as the tenure of a half dozen of my predecessors. My Moroccan hosts asked for my removal because they were upset with someone else. It has proven a useful pattern for the Kingdom to demonstrate its power in an asymmetric contest against the UN.

Peter van Walsum, the didactic Dutchman, had left his post as Personal Envoy His departure was greeted with public (but not private) satisfaction in Rabouni, and Algiers, and thus was seen as a rebuff by Rabat who were left feeling that, despite their early elation at van Walsum's evident *realpolitik*, somehow Polisario had bested them. This in turn resulted in the (self confessed) tit for tat Moroccan decision that they no longer had confidence in me. I made a pointedly delayed but slightly uncomfortable departure from Laayoune, not before my hosts had graciously arranged meetings with the Foreign Minister and the Minister of Interior and a formal lunch with five Governors. Possibly a first for a *persona non grata*.

The Danube and Sava call again

My third and final stint in Belgrade followed (March-November 2009). Kosovo remained atop the Agenda, but new creaks and groans in the Dayton peace settlement architecture, as Bosnia and Herzegovina inches closer toward the EU, also began to draw new attention back to my first UN stomping grounds.

The failure of the Ahtisaari plan in the Security Council had left a mess on the ground. Kosovo, with the backing of its most enthusiastic Western supporters, had declared independence in early 2008. Pristina, however, did not control all of Kosovo's territory, and could not get into many of the international organizations and arrangements necessary for real statehood. Both in Pristina and Belgrade, the political fall-out of this mess was a further radicalization of opinion, and the real possibility of renewed violence.

I had long argued -- not always with success -- that there could be no lasting peace in the Balkans without serious engagement with Belgrade. It needed to be engaged, and drawn into the European mainstream. Unacceptable actions needed to be confronted; legitimate concerns needed to be addressed. I was therefore delighted, on my return in March 2009, to find that the Secretary-General had found a course of action that accommodated the Kosovars' basic aspirations; acknowledged and addressed the Serbs' main concerns, and created the conditions for a deeply divided European Union to deploy its mission on terms acceptable to all its members and to both Albanians and Serbs. This was formalized in a brief, but enormously significant, statement by the President of the Security Council in November 2008.

The Secretary-General's formula was a success, and the prospect of violence steadily receded. In Serbia, progressively more moderate, and more pro-European, governments have come to power. My main challenge, during this last chapter, was to help keep the Secretary-General's formula working, and to keep Belgrade constructively engaged with it. For the most part, this happened. Pristina's keenest supporters, however, had a baffling tendency to over-play their hands, both diplomatically and on the ground, with predictably counter-productive results. A sad example on the ground occurred just before I left, when Pristina, with support from its friends, decided to cut off the electricity to the Serb communities in North Kosovo. Belgrade, of course, immediately connected them to the Serbian grid, which we -- and they -- had hoped to avoid." On the broader stage their dogged(some might say dog in the manger) efforts to resist by hook and often by crook any UN involvement in the process, at great cost to their own credibility, will remain one of the puzzles I will continue to worry about into my retirement

In my last days in Belgrade a statue to Bill Clinton was erected in Pristina, and unveiled by the man himself. I could not help reflecting how much happier he would have been if that statue had been in Baghdad and how sad it is that if all you have left of a policy of what you believed to be 'benign aggression' in Kosovo, Iraq and even Afghanistan is one statue, it is sad but not altogether surprising that you defend that policy at whatever cost in terms of finance and credibility. Blair of course has no statue in either place.

Meanwhile I was able to note that the long transition away from the Milosevic era in Serbia had continued slowly to advance, and I was pleased to note the progress in the quality of governance and state policy making in Belgrade. In some diplomatic maneuvers worthy of a rather larger and better resourced state, Serbia managed, during the 60th General Assembly in 2008, to convince a majority of states to request from the International Court of Justice, pursuant to Article 65 of its Statute, to render an Advisory Opinion on the question: "Is the unilateral declaration of independence by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government of Kosovo in accordance with international law?" As I depart, national opinions have been delivered and the case is just getting started. Notably for the first time ever, all five permanent members of the Council have signaled their intention to argue in front of the Court

The main effect for Serbia, it believes, has been to buy more time for negotiation (formally or informally) on whatever the true future settlement may be (hopefully, a durable and peaceful one). Time will, of course, see an end to the dispute. Partition seems now to be less than just a shadow in the mist. What a real defeat that would be for Europe, and what an invitation to mischief elsewhere.

As I leave Belgrade for the third time, it is clear that the complicated questions over sovereignty, self-determination, national and state boundaries and borders are likely to

continue, and will probably require some greater European chutzpah to emerge (eventually) if “stability” in Southeast Europe is to become more than just the subject of pleasant conferences in calmer spots on the European continent.

So much betterso much still to do.

Much has changed since my early dark days with DPKO. It is a better place to work due to great efforts made in New York to address historical problems of Peacekeeping management. The work done in the last three years in particular has changed so much for the better that it would be hard to itemise the differences. Suffice to say there remain very significant problems, some endemic to any international organization. However the days of the ‘old style’ UN Administrator/warlord in the field are largely over, and a new breed, operating new rules and new systems, is now in place in many missions. While congratulations are in order for this, we should also note that the General Assembly rejected the main platform on which the new personnel system was to be based: parity with the Agencies. Only time will tell whether DPKO was wise to have accepted second best or should have insisted on all or nothing...

The Personnel management and welfare systems remain very problematic. It takes inexcusably long to fill key posts. In some ways the need to demonstrate transparency has become so exaggerated that it has made the real process unworkable. The internal ‘Justice System’, which is also in the throes of reform, is ill, and so cumbersome that it does little to encourage the genuine seeker of justice, alongside much to encourage the lazy and the mischievous.

In my periods as Head of Mission, these two areas have provided me the greatest pressure and the greatest disappointment. Those who administer are themselves under enormous pressure, but the changes often make their task harder and perhaps less rewarding. In Missions an analysis of ‘what makes delivery of the mandate more difficult’, will almost always have Human Resource Management at the top of the list. Much faith is being placed in the ‘imminent’ adoption of a new computerised system to aid management decision making. All my own experience tells me two things: First, the organization should be wary of succumbing to ‘Rubbish in, rubbish out’ syndrome. Computerized management will only work if the information fed into the system is honest and reasonably objective, and managers can hire and fire. Second, the separation of operational command from logistical command is fraught with danger, particularly when the new Department of Mission Support failed to bring procurement functions (upwards of 2 Billion dollars a year) with it and has less than perfect control of communications. I understand that there are moves afoot to move elements of procurement out to the field. This should at least bring some synergy.

So, as I progress from Peacemaker to Pacemaker, I see a much better UN Peacekeeping structure and management than when I arrived. A much more purposeful and better directed effort is being made to meet and understand the demands being made upon the Organisation, and there is a much more structured and kinder working environment.

Everyone now understands that it would be preferable if no new peace operations were deployed in circumstances where a durable and comprehensive political settlement has yet to been reached.

“Unfortunately, that is wishful thinking. If anything, recent precedent and prevailing geopolitical dynamics point to trends in the opposite direction. At least some peace operations will be called upon to deploy into situations where mediation efforts have not advanced the discussion very far on the core political issues, where there is only a partial peace to keep, and consent of the parties is ambiguous. The lessons of the mid-1990s continue to suggest that the deployment of peacekeepers in such circumstances can only be a recipe for failure.”

The catastrophic failure of any one operation could undermine confidence in UN peacekeeping and in the UN as a whole, for it is Peacekeeping and blue berets that have captured the public imagination around the world, and it is Peacekeeping that remains the most visible of all the UN’s activities. The demand for blue berets will continue and whether the UN can or should take on more must be seen in the light of few global alternatives.

Of all the world’s organizations, the UN is least able to turn its back on those whose very lives hang in the balance.

Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding is a truly great and blessed enterprise and it has been an enormous privilege to be a part of it. JJH 30 November 2009

