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RUSSIA'S PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING

"Russia intends to continue increasing our practical contribution to UN peacekeeping and peace-building activities," Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said in September 2010 during his announcement that Russia was increasing its payments to the UN peacekeeping fund to \$2 million per annum. But Russia's peacekeeping program must undergo certain reforms.

The formation of the system of collective operations by groups of states in conflict zones began in the late 1940s, soon after the creation of the United Nations. That system has now been in existence for over six decades; more than 60 operations of various types have been conducted in its framework.¹ Twenty such operations were under way on four continents in 2010; they involved about 110,000 people.² Because the UN does not have its own armed forces, its operations rely on temporarily deployed personnel provided by 118 countries.

In addition to the UN operations, we have seen gradual emergence of the practice of intervention (including military intervention) in conflicts by various regional organizations. Such operations have been conducted by the African Union (and other African sub-regional organizations, including the Economic Community of West African States and Southern African Development Community), the Organization of American States (OAS), and in Europe by the EU, NATO, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

Another trend that has emerged in the past two decades is the creation of coalitions of states, which, on behalf of international organizations or based on their own collective decision, have implemented an international mandate for intervention. Examples include the US-led coalitions in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Australian-led coalition during the UN operations in East Timor, and several others. A number of countries, such as the United States, have developed their own formal doctrines for peacekeeping operations.³ The United States and, in some cases, Russia and other countries now use the term "peacekeeping" to describe certain actions by states or groups of states in conflict zones, even when such actions are not authorized by the UN or some regional organization.

For example, Russia has described as peacekeeping operations the use of its armed forces as a third party during conflicts on the territory of another country based on a bilateral agreement with that country and without a mandate from the UN, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) or the CIS (operations in the Dniester Region and South Ossetia, which were based on 1992 presidential agreements).

As a result there is now a narrow definition of peacekeeping as a system of UN operations in conflict zones, carried out on behalf of the international community and based on the UN Charter. There is also a broad definition of international peacekeeping that has emerged over the past two decades. That definition includes all forms of international collective intervention (by states, coalitions, and international or regional organizations) with the aim of conflict settlement and/or resolution.



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Unlike the classical international wars and conflicts, a growing number of modern conflicts are not international. They are fought within the states themselves, and/or some of their participants are not state actors. As a result the distinction between peacekeeping operations and intervention by the international community (or some of its members) in the internal affairs of sovereign states is becoming increasingly blurred. There is growing debate over the legitimacy of the various forms and types of intervention.

PROBLEM OF MUTUAL RECOGNITION AND LEGITIMIZATION

The principles and practice of the use of military force by international organizations during conflicts has changed beyond recognition in the past two decades. There are significant differences in the approaches used by Russia and other countries, especially the United States, to the objectives, nature, and legitimacy of intervening in conflicts on another country's territory, including conflicts in newly independent states.

In place of a single approach to UN peacekeeping with Security Council authorization, in which all the Eastern and Western countries would take part in equal measure, we now have several increasingly diverging models of international intervention in conflicts.

The first model is a continuation of classical UN peacekeeping operations authorized by the Security Council or approved by the UN General Assembly. Some of these operations have been universally recognized as failures (Rwanda and Somalia), while others have been an unqualified success (such as the operation in East Timor, which has become the 191st member of the UN after a UN peacekeeping operation).

The second model is intervention in conflicts by regional organizations and coalitions of nations, authorized by regional organizations in the absence of a UN mandate. The operation by an international coalition in Iraq in 2003 in the absence of a UN mandate was not the first or the only such case. Over the past decade there have been at least 10 military interventions by great powers or regional organizations in conflicts without a UN mandate. Such interventions have been undertaken by NATO, the United States, Russia, and the CIS.

In a clear demonstration of Cold War thinking, military interventions in foreign conflicts by the United States, NATO, and Western countries on the one side, and by Russia and the CIS on the other, are increasingly diverging, with both sides refusing to recognize each other's actions as legitimate peacekeeping.

Western countries refuse to recognize as legitimate peacekeeping Moscow's actions under a CIS mandate in Tajikistan and Abkhazia, and under bilateral agreements in Moldova and South Ossetia. The Western position has become especially entrenched since Russia sent its troops to Georgia in August 2008.

Russia, for its part, refuses to recognize the legitimacy of Western (especially NATO) action against Yugoslavia in 1999, and the operation by the U.S., Britain, and other allies against Iraq in 2003 without a UN mandate (before the mandate was received from the UN Security Council).

Mutual recriminations over military interventions culminated in 1999, when the West severely criticized Russia at the Istanbul summit over the Chechnya campaign. In response, Moscow threatened to quit the OSCE and the CFE treaty. The consequences of that crisis still linger in the text of the Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine, which is very critical of the OSCE. Also in 1999 Russia lambasted the West and NATO for bombing Belgrade without a UN mandate for 11 weeks. Later on the mandate was agreed and the military intervention in Kosovo became a joint NATO–Russia operation.

A new wave of Russian criticisms of the West for acting without UN authorization came after the U.S.-led coalition began its operation against Iraq in 2003, before receiving a UN mandate. But soon afterwards President George W. Bush, who had won the military campaign, forgave President Vladimir Putin for his independent position (proclaiming so at the St Petersburg summit). For his part, Putin, in a series of joint interviews, forgave the initial action in Iraq without UN authorization, because a UN Security Council mandate for the post-invasion operation in Iraq was received later.

In 2008 the West returned in kind Russia's previous accusations regarding the inadmissibility of portraying as peacekeeping a military operation conducted on foreign territory without UN

authorization and without consent from both warring factions. It launched a campaign of criticism against Russia for temporarily sending its troops to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Initially Russia described its operation as “forcing Georgia to peace” (wrongly so, as it happens, because under Article 53 of the UN Charter, all enforcement operations must be authorized by a UN Security Council resolution). Later on it began to justify the Five Day War by invoking Article 51 of the UN Charter (the right to self-defense). Meanwhile, Georgia’s widespread use of force against civilian infrastructure (shelling and bombardments) had resulted in large numbers of civilian casualties. As result, something that may have begun as Georgia’s attempt to preserve its territorial integrity had degenerated into something entirely different, namely a humanitarian catastrophe, which the international community and any third parties had a duty to prevent. That is why Russia’s action should more properly be described as a humanitarian intervention (i.e. intervention to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe).

The history of international interventions during conflicts knows many examples of a humanitarian operation being launched by one of the parties or by a coalition before the international community issues a mandate for such an operation. That was the case with the NATO operation to force Slobodan Milosevic to change his policy in Kosovo in 1999. The operation received international authorization in the form of a UN Security Council resolution three months after it had begun. The same situation happened in 2003, when an international coalition invaded Iraq. The UN Security Council resolution that gave the whole operation legitimacy had been adopted only after the fall of Baghdad. During the Kosovo crisis Russia, China, India, and a number of other countries were adamantly opposed to any use of force without UN Security Council authorization. In 2003 Russia was joined by France, Germany, and others. But after months of negotiations and diplomatic clashes both operations did eventually receive justification from the international community; both retained their status as operations by the international community, or as operations conducted with UN consent and approval.

There have also been less internationalized precedents of special operations on the territory of a neighboring country without international authorization. Suffice to recall the Israeli operation in Lebanon in 2007, which Israel itself, and then the United States, qualified as an anti-terrorism operation. Another precedent was the Turkish operation against the Kurds in northern Iraq. In February 2008, when Kosovo proclaimed independence, Russia warned that it could use the same special circumstances justification to recognize newly independent states in the Caucasus—and that is exactly what it did after 2008.

The crisis over South Ossetia and Abkhazia had once again demonstrated that peacekeeping, as well as the more traditional area of ethnic and territorial conflicts, remains a subject of controversy and the subject of clashes of interests of the great powers.



RUSSIA’S PARTICIPATION IN JOINT OPERATIONS

UN and EU

As of early 2010 Russia had 366 of its servicemen taking part in various UN peacekeeping operations around the globe, including 55 people serving in the police forces, 77 military observers, and 239 with the actual military contingents. Russian peacekeepers were taking part in the following operations:

- ❑ Western Sahara (official UN name of the operation: MINURSO);
- ❑ Central African Republic and Chad (MINURCAT);
- ❑ Haiti (MINUSTAH);
- ❑ Ivory Coast (UNOCI);
- ❑ DR Congo (MONUC);
- ❑ Kosovo (UNMIK);
- ❑ Liberia (UNMIL);

- ❑ Sudan (UNMIL); and
- ❑ East Timor (UNMIT).

Despite the relatively broad geography of the Russian peacekeeping presence, one has to admit that the scale of Russian involvement in UN peacekeeping operations is not that impressive for a great power that wants to play a global role in world politics. In terms of the number of its peacekeepers serving with the UN missions (300–400 people), Russia ranks 31st. To illustrate, the European Union makes about 8,000 people available for peacekeeping missions every year.

As for EU–Russia relations, consultations between the two on the most pressing international problems have so far failed to yield any discernible progress on practical European and international security cooperation. For a long time almost the only tangible result of such cooperation was the participation of a handful of Russian officers in the EU police mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina. That almost symbolic participation did not give Russia any political or operational influence on the mission. Russia has also taken part in EU command staff exercises at the invitation of Brussels—but it participated only as an observer, not as a partner.

In April 2006 Russia also sent several helicopters to help the EU and UN mission in Darfur (Sudan). Some 120 Russian military specialists and four Mi-8 helicopters provide air transport to UN and EU military observers and conduct search and rescue operations.

NATO

Over the past two decades Russia and NATO have accumulated some rather limited experience of practical cooperation in peacekeeping. In the 1990s Russia took part in two NATO-led and UN-authorized peacekeeping missions, first in Bosnia, then in Yugoslavia (Kosovo). In the past 10 years a working group under the NATO–Russia Council has produced the outlines of a doctrine of joint peacekeeping operations. Russia has also helped during the operation in Afghanistan (offering assistance from its own territory and territory of the Central Asian republics), and opened up the northern transit corridor (through Russia and Central Asia to Afghanistan).

Formally, Russian–Western cooperation on Afghanistan is not categorized as a peacekeeping operation. Nevertheless, Russia had provided assistance to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan in the past, and opened up its territory to Afghanistan-bound transit. This includes the latest decisions reached during the NATO secretary-general’s visit to Moscow in 2010 to make greater use of the overland transit corridor, to train Afghan policemen in the Russian Interior Ministry academy, and to repair in Russia some of the helicopters involved in the operation in Afghanistan. This Russian assistance certainly helps the international coalition to carry out the UN-authorized international operation in Afghanistan.

Joint mechanism of conflict monitoring with subsequent independent action by various international organizations

The key task that needs to be addressed to maintain security in Europe at this stage is not so much to preserve the balance of nuclear or conventional forces but to form a mechanism of joint conflict settlement by the Euro-Atlantic community. Since the security structures now existing in the Euro-Atlantic area are fairly diverse, Russia could propose to begin a process of universalization of the existing security structures. The priority would be to build a universal mechanism of joint (as opposed to competitive) monitoring in local conflict zones based on a joint UN mandate.

The six main security organizations now active in the Euro-Atlantic (UN, OSCE, EU, NATO, Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)) could send their observers to regional conflict zones based on a single agreement and a single coordinated UN mandate. Such an approach would go a long way towards addressing the existing lack of coordination between the various actors in their conflict-settlement efforts.

All subsequent actions to settle the conflict would then be taken by the respective international organizations (including NATO, the EU, and the CSTO) independently, based on their own special procedures, mandates and mechanisms.

Such a proposal would constitute a diluted version of a joint approach to crisis response. It would significantly enhance information exchange and transparency, while preserving independence in decision-making and practical steps. The advantage of such a proposal is that it can be implemented fairly quickly the next time the need for conflict settlement arises, without creating any additional structures.

REFORMING THE RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPING PROGRAM

The practice of military interventions in conflicts is becoming more common; it is bringing political results and dividends every year. A number of organizations in which the G8 countries maintain leading positions (including the UN, NATO, the EU, and the CIS/CSTO) have already created or are about to create new instruments for future military interventions. In 2006–2007 NATO set up a 20,000-strong NATO Response Force (NRF). The EU is developing its own Rapid Reaction Force in the form of operational-tactical groups (five–seven groups, each 1,500 strong). The CIS/CSTO has formed first the Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF) for Central Asia, and then, starting from 2009, the Collective Rapid Reaction Force (CRRF).

Russia and the West must now meet each other halfway in overcoming the problem of mutual non-recognition of their peacekeeping operations. They need to take a look at the contentious situations from the other side, and search for joint or mutually acceptable formulas for the use of military force during conflicts.

Peacekeeping cooperation between Moscow and the Western countries in conflict zones remains a fairly likely prospect in the medium term. Russia, the EU, and NATO do not intend to abandon their attempts to achieve settlement of the same conflicts on their own terms, including the conflicts in the South Caucasus, Moldova, and Central Asia.


Russia therefore needs to pursue the following reforms of its peacekeeping program:

- ❑ A mechanism of five-party consultations should be developed between Russia, the U.S., NATO, the EU, and the UN when conflicts break out in Eurasia and the need arises for crisis response.
- ❑ A Eurasian coordination council of regional international organizations should be created that would include NATO, the EU, the CSTO, the CSO, and the OSCE, with UN participation, to coordinate and allocate functions and responsibilities between these organizations in resolving various international security crises. Such a council could operate in the format of an annual (an extraordinary, in the event of a crisis) meeting of the heads of the member organizations, and in other formats at the level of working bodies, especially crisis monitoring and crisis settlement bodies. The council could send joint monitoring and fact-finding missions to the conflict zones. Each of the participating international organizations would delegate representatives to such missions. Even if each of these organizations then makes independent political decisions based on the findings of the missions, such an approach would substantially improve coordination. The usefulness of such a mechanism was illustrated during the Kyrgyz–Uzbek ethnic clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan in the spring of 2010. Independent peacekeeping or anti-crisis involvement by the CSTO or NATO was impossible for various reasons, but it is quite likely that a joint EU–CSTO–NATO mission involving UN humanitarian assistance mechanisms would have been acceptable. The Kyrgyz crisis would have been a suitable occasion for the first joint involvement of the components of the CSTO Collective Rapid Deployment Force, NATO Rapid Reaction Force, and police components of the EU rapid reaction forces.
- ❑ Russia, as a member of the UN Security Council, should initiate the formulation of a UNSC mandate for the CSTO to stabilize the situation on the Afghan–Tajik and Afghan–Uzbek borders and in the territories to the north of those borders. The exact phrasing of that mandate should be in line with the existing resolutions that give NATO the coordinating role in international coalition operations to the south of the border, on Afghan territory;

Russia should pursue much closer and broader cooperation with the Euro-Atlantic community in implementing a common UNSC mandate for Afghan reconstruction. That cooperation must be conducted from the territory of Russia and the Central Asian republics, without sending Russian troops to be part of the coalition forces in Afghanistan itself. Troops of the NATO-coordinated



Western coalition, meanwhile, must not end their operation in Afghanistan without agreeing with Russia and the CSTO countries joint measures for subsequent stabilization in the region, especially along the northern borders of Afghanistan. It must be clearly recognized that a pullout of the international coalition from Afghanistan at this stage would inevitably lead to a Taliban expansion, which would be an extremely serious threat to the security of Central Asia and Russia itself. It would be very difficult for Russia to contain that threat without an international coalition component. That is why Russia can and should expand its cooperation with the international coalition in Afghanistan. The current level of cooperation (transit corridor and repair of old Soviet-made helicopters) is clearly not sufficient. Except for direct participation of Russian servicemen in combat operations on Afghan territory (which should clearly be avoided), all other forms of military cooperation with coalition forces in Afghanistan in the interests of stabilization can and should be pursued. That includes rear services, training (locally or in Russia) of Afghan soldiers and police, assistance in supplies and repairs of arms and military equipment, exchange of reconnaissance information (within acceptable limits), cooperation in monitoring the airspace and guarding the borders, and other measures.

- ❑ Moscow should seek to develop and adopt a set of agreements with Brussels on joint crisis response. Such agreements should build on the experience of cooperation with the EU and NATO in the Berlin-plus framework, and formalize the principles and mechanisms of Russia–NATO (with elements of CSTO–NATO) cooperation during possible joint action in crisis situations and joint operations to enforce and maintain peace.
- ❑ Moscow should seek mutual coordination of training programs and then actual joint training of military peacekeepers serving in special Russia and NATO forces designated for joint Russia–NATO operations in conflict zones.
- ❑ To enhance political cooperation and operational compatibility of Russian and Western forces, Moscow should seek greater participation of its peacekeepers (combined multirole brigades) in international peacekeeping forces under a UN mandate in various parts of the globe, including Africa and at some point the Middle East, as well as other regions.
- ❑ Russia needs to overcome a certain psychological and political barrier to developing new peacekeeping initiatives (separation missions, border, and monitoring missions) in the South Caucasus (Karabakh, Georgia/Abkhazia/South Ossetia) and in the Moldova/Dniester Region in the form of joint Russia–EU missions, possibly involving NATO structures. Russia has the trust and support of one of the warring factions in these conflicts, while the EU and NATO have the trust of the other faction. In this situation only joint Russian–Western operations can be effective in the mediation and settlement of these conflicts in the CIS.
- ❑ Let us take note that U.S. legislation distinguishes three different types of operations under a UN mandate involving U.S. forces: actions as part of the UN forces, actions in support of UN forces, and actions to implement UN Security Council resolutions. Russia should consider similar legislation to allow various forms of participation of Russian troops “as part of UN forces” or “as part of regional organizations’ forces” (i.e. CSTO forces), as well as other forms of participation “jointly with forces of regional organizations” (i.e. NATO and the EU) or “in support of regional organizations’ forces.” 

NOTES

¹ According to the UN peacekeeping operations department, there have been 64 peacekeeping operations under UN mandate between 1945 and early 2010.

² The figure includes 77,000 military servicemen (including military observers), 11,000 police personnel, 5,000 international civilian personnel, 15,000 local civilian personnel, and 2,000 volunteers.

³ See, for example, *Guide for Participants in Peace, Stability and Relief Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 2007).