

# DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD *and* UNITED NATIONS PEACEKEEPING





United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld arrived in Gaza on 23 December 1958 to spend Christmas with the troops of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF). At left is Lt.Col. J.C. Ruy, Commander of the Brazilian Battalion, and at centre, 2nd row, is UNEF Commander, Lt.Gen. E.L.M. Burns, who accompanied the Secretary-General. UN PHOTO

By CARL BILDT

**W**hen Dag Hammarskjöld was appointed Secretary-General of the United Nations on 7 April 1953, there was a full-scale war on the Korean peninsula, the Organization was deeply divided between East and West, and the Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council over the refusal of the United Nations to give the now communist Chinese regime a seat on the Council. It was by no means a safe bet that the United Nations was going to be more successful than its predecessor, the League of Nations, in preventing an outbreak of a new world war.

The man who took on this mission, however, had a firm belief in the United Nations role as an international peace-keeping body and protector of the interests and integrity of less powerful nations. He was also a strong believer in the power of diplomacy. He knew that even the most intense conflicts must reach a political solution, and that it was the task of international diplomacy to pave the way towards that end.

One would not necessarily expect a person of vision and principle to also be a pragmatic and creative person. That is why Dag Hammarskjöld, fifty years after his death, continues to fascinate and inspire people from all over the world. Hammarskjöld combined these seemingly antithetical virtues remarkably well. His often quoted ambition that the United Nations should be a dynamic instrument for its Member States essentially cast pragmatism as vision, for Hammarskjöld

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understood that the Organization's relevance lay in its ability to constantly adapt to new challenges.

Peacekeeping is perhaps the most prominent example of that adaptation. When the Suez Crisis erupted in 1956, the United Nations Charter did not contain any provisions for using impartial and armed UN forces to stabilize fragile situations. It still does not—but neither has it ever barred such arrangements. For Hammarskjöld, this void was an opportunity rather than a constraint. On the basis of a suggestion from Canada's Foreign Minister, Lester Pearson, he devised the concept of peacekeeping in a few days, and managed to assemble the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) within weeks. It testifies to Hammarskjöld's wisdom that the basic principles of UNEF's operation have remained a central feature of all similar UN interventions to this day. As we consider the future of UN peacekeeping, however, we should view UNEF as the epitome of Hammarskjöld's pragmatism and creativity.

A number of developments have fundamentally altered the premise of UN peacekeeping since the Suez Crisis. The end of the Cold War gave rise to intrastate conflicts of political as well as ethnic and religious stripe, conflicts that had been kept in check by the bipolar tension. Globalization and the improvement of all means of communication have shrunk distances in time and space. The emergence of regional forms of organization have created structures that sometimes complement, sometimes duplicate, the functions of the United Nations. While these circumstances have enabled UN peacekeeping operations to take on a wider range of conflicts than before, they have also created significant challenges.

Today, the actors are more numerous and the agenda is broader.

Since the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has played a significant role in a number of operations in the Balkans, the Middle East, and Afghanistan. The European Union is currently implementing its External Action Service in order to further increase its diplomatic strength and political relevance. The Arab League and the African Union are important actors in Africa. In Asia, cooperation within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is steadily developing. With regard to the broadening of the agenda, the tool box today includes measures to prevent conflicts and to support state building and institutional and economic development, in addition to classic peacekeeping actions. The United Nations has also become a key actor in developing the international legal framework for codes of conduct and rules of engagement, and in dealing with the consequences of armed conflicts.

In recent years, the discussion on the new challenges has been guided by two landmark publications: the *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations* of 2000 (the "Brahimi Report"), and the UN Secretariat "non-paper" *A New Partnership Agenda: Charting a New Horizon for UN Peacekeeping* of 2009 (the "New Horizon" initiative).

The Brahimi panel found that peacekeeping operations were increasingly deployed not in post-conflict situations, but in stalemate situations where at least one of the parties was not seriously committed to ending the confrontation. The panel, therefore, acknowledged the need for UN forces to be prepared to "confront the lingering forces of war and violence" and to have "the ability and determination to defeat them." The panel stressed that impartiality for United Nations operations must mean adherence to

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the principles of the Charter. Where one party is incontrovertibly violating the Charter's terms, continued equal treatment may amount to complicity with evil. Further, an operation's authority to use force should be specified and its rules of engagement should be sufficiently robust to prevent UN contingents from ceding the initiative to peace spoilers.

The New Horizon non-paper took stock of the increasing scale and complexity of UN peacekeeping operations in the first decade of the new millennium. It emphasized the need to forge a stronger political consensus, shift the focus from quantity to quality and capabilities of troops, enhance the accountability among the stakeholders of UN peacekeeping, and develop a coherent strategy for the United Nations field support system.

The Brahimi Report and the New Horizon non-paper offered an encouraging direction, while honouring the spirit and letter of the Charter and reiterating the basic principles of UN peacekeeping. The documents recognize, as Hammar skjöld did with regard to the United Nations as a whole, that UN peacekeeping is an imperfect but indispensable instrument for the international community.

The increasing numbers of international actors, as well as the broader agenda, do not depreciate the role and importance that the United Nations plays in global peacekeeping. On the

contrary, it is an affirmation of the importance of the task itself and an acknowledgement that many states and regional actors today feel a direct responsibility to partake in the global agenda for peace and conflict prevention. The United Nations role will be different from the role it played in the fifties and sixties, but it will not be less important. The United Nations will still provide legitimacy for necessary actions and be the primary coordinator of the international response to future global and regional crises. In all its diversity, the United Nations will still be the main forum for the international dialogue on peacekeeping, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution.

The United Nations is a cornerstone of Sweden's foreign policy. Together with our fellow members of the European Union, we welcomed the Brahimi Report and strongly support the further development of the New Horizon initiative. The common ground that has now been reached needs to be consolidated and broadened.

**First**, the importance of protecting civilians must be acknowledged. The success or failure to protect civilians directly affects the credibility and legitimacy of UN peacekeeping operations, as well as their standing with populations in conflict areas. It is encouraging that the UN Member States recognized this circumstance during the 2010 session of the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations of the

United Nations. Missions need to have clear Security Council mandates, well-crafted guidelines, robust command and control systems, and the ability and determination to perform this difficult task.

**Second**, the nexus between peacekeeping and peacebuilding must be strengthened. By providing security and support, peacekeepers play an enabling role for national and international actors to implement long-term peacebuilding measures in areas such as police, rule of law, Security Sector Reform (SSR), and Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration.

**Third**, the demand for civilian expertise in fields such as rule of law, justice, and SSR is increasing, especially in complex peacekeeping operations. We must respond to this by strengthening the supply, retention, and support of civilian personnel. It is important that countries from the Global South be given equal opportunities to contribute personnel.

**Fourth**, we should follow the example of Dag Hammar skjöld's *Summary Study*, first published in 1958, and turn our scrutiny to the UN system itself and our working methods. It is encouraging to see that the initiative to start informal consultations with a view to revising the working methods of the Special Committee, forwarded during the Swedish Presidency of the European Union in 2009 and the Spanish Presidency in 2010, has received widespread support among UN Member States.

In conclusion, let us remember that Hammar skjöld's overarching and primary commitment was to the evolution of the United Nations. Whether he recognized it or not, he was the United Nations able pilot on this journey. Hammar skjöld's view that the United Nations embodied the "edge of development of human society" and worked on the "brink of the unknown" remains an inspiring vision. 