Peacekeeping by Regional Organisations

Lt Gen Vijay Kumar Jetley, PVSM, UYSM, Retired*

With the end of the Second World War, there was a general feeling that trouble and strife had ended, heralding a golden era of peace. That was perhaps one of the reasons why in the Charter of the newly created United Nations (UN) Organisation there is no mention of the word "peacekeeping." The UN at that point of time did not envisage that it would ever have to step in anywhere to restore a situation. This euphoria, however, was short-lived, for, with decolonisation, the UN was besieged with requests for help in trouble spots all over the world.

As resources of the UN were never enough to meet the demand, many regional initiatives were born. These initiatives either resolved prickly issues in their backyards by taking their own initiative or under the umbrella of the UN. Unfortunately, their modus operandi for doing what the UN missions do is still a grey area for most of us.

To understand regional forces better, it is essential to be acquainted with the role of regional organisations in peacekeeping with particular reference to the nature and scope of the involvement of regional forces, forms of cooperation between regional forces and the UN, and advantages and disadvantages of using regional forces vis-à-vis the UN.

After the Cold War, the concept of regional peacekeeping under the authorisation of the UN Security Council increasingly gained currency. Interstate and intrastate conflicts virtually left no region in the world untouched, compelling the UN to hammer out numerous peace initiatives simultaneously. The existing operational framework and resource level of the UN did not permit it to give its undivided attention to all the conflict-ridden regions of the world at the same time. One had to accept the reality that the worldwide crises of the 1990s have highlighted. It was the sheer complexity and magnitude of these conflicts which often compelled the Security Council to take a controversial stand of selectivity or indifference.

On the African Continent, many inter- and intrastate conflicts have been brought about due to a lack of coincidence between nation and state; suppression of minority communities and ethnic tensions; corrupt and dictatorial regimes, quite often supported externally by inter-

*Commissioned into the Dogra Regiment on 25 December 1965, Lieutenant General Jetley commanded the Siachin Brigade and a corps in the northeast, served as force commander of the UN mission in Sierra Leone, and retired as master general of ordnance on 30 November 2004. He is a member of United Service Institution Council.

Reprinted with permission from the *Journal of the United Service Institution of India* 139, no. 577 (July–September 2009): 378–91.

national arms traders and the vested interests of nations constituting the so-called civilized society; and chronic poverty leading to underdevelopment and a grinding debt burden.

To combat the problems plaguing it on the African Continent, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) took it upon itself to find a solution. The secretary-general of the OAU (now African Union [AU]), Dr. Salim Ahmed Salim, said at a meeting in 1998, "OAU Member States can no longer afford to stand aloof and expect the International Community to care more for our problems than we do, or indeed to find solutions to those problems which in many instances, have been of our own making. The simple truth that we must confront today, is that the world does not owe us a living and we must remain in the forefront of efforts to act and act speedily, to prevent conflicts from getting out of control."

The bottom line of all UN peacekeeping (UNPK) operations in the initial stages was to deal with international conflicts involving governments. Such operations were authorised by the UN Security Council, in exceptional cases by the UN General Assembly (UNEF-1), and were always directed by the secretary-general. The functioning of such UN missions was governed by the fundamental principles of consent, impartiality, and non-use of force, except in self-defence.

Over the last half a century plus, the number of conflicts has increased. They have become more intense and brutal where violation of human rights has become a norm. The UN has not been able to cope with the rush of such conflicts and has therefore had to fall back upon regional peacekeeping forces to retrieve the situation within the geographical limits of their regions. The frequent use of such forces is becoming the rule rather than the exception.

Nature and Scope of Involvement of Regional Organisations

The founding members of the UN had foreseen the birth of regional peace organisations and duly provided for them in the UN Charter. Chapter 8 clearly defines the role of regional organisations in the maintenance of international peace and security. Article 52 of the UN Charter encourages regional arrangements or groupings, and even agencies, to make every effort to achieve settlement of local disputes before referring them to the Security Council.

Article 53 states that, where appropriate, the Security Council should utilise such regional arrangements for enforcement actions under its authority, but that no enforcement action will be undertaken without the authorisation of the Security Council. Article 54 further states that the Security Council shall at all times be kept fully informed of activities undertaken or in contemplation under regional arrangements.

The Brahimi Panel Report endorses this view by stating that, "where enforcement action is required, it has consistently been entrusted to coalitions of willing States, within the authorisation of the Security Council, acting under Chapter VIII of the Charter."

The second-generation UNPK operations have taken the form of enforcement actions, wherein the consent of the parties to the conflict was either partially or wholly ignored. More often than not, the force did not have the necessary combat power to be considered a credible force by the parties to the conflict. In such situations, regional organisations with

necessary combat potential and staying power could undertake the enforcement action in a quicker time frame. In cases where the regional organisations are providing the military cover, the UN could go about the task of nation building with the help of other non-military regional organisations.

Forms of Cooperation between the UN and Regional Organisations

The supplement to An Agenda for Peace, issued on 3 January 1995, outlines the forms of cooperation between the UN and regional organisations. These can basically be categorised as follows:

a. *Consultation.* The purpose of this form of co-operation is to exchange views on conflicts that both the UN and the regional organisations may be trying to solve. In some cases, consultation is formal, with periodic reports made to the General Assembly; in other cases, it is less formal, with the secretary-general calling consultative meetings with the heads of all regional organisations and arrangements co-operating with the UN.

b. *Diplomatic Support.* Regional organisations have participated in peace-making activities of the UN that led to the establishment of peacekeeping operations, and supported them by diplomatic initiatives. The OAU, the Arab League, and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) played this role in supporting the UN efforts in Somalia. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has been playing this role, for instance, on constitutional issues in Georgia and Tajikistan, and the UN has been supporting the OSCE on the issue of Nagorny Karabakh.

c. *Operational Support.* This co-operation varies according to requirements on the ground. One example was the provision by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) of air power to support the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in the former Yugoslavia. Another was the support provided by the NATO-led multinational Implementation Force / Stabilisation Force (IFOR/SFOR) to the United Nations Transitional Authority in Eastern Slovenia, Baranja, and Western Sirmium (UNTAES) in establishing a safe and secure environment in the region of Croatia and the operational support provided by Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) forces to the UN observer mission in Tajikistan. The European Union (EU) has provided support in Eastern Slovenia, Bosnia, and Liberia while the Western European Union (WEU) has provided support to de-mining activities of the UNPK forces in Iraq and Kuwait.

d. *Co-Deployment.* UN field missions have been deployed in conjunction with UNPK forces of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and of the CIS in Georgia and Tajikistan. This model has again been followed in Bosnia and Herzegovina where the UN and regional organisation were co-deployed with different mandates. The United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) includes the International Police Task Force (IPTF), which, among other things, monitors

the local police. The NATO-led multinational peacekeeping force (IFOR/SFOR) helps maintain a safe and secure environment. OSCE assists in the organisation of elections, while the EU provides development assistance and the Office of the High Representative is responsible for overall co-ordination.

e. *Joint Operations.* In Haiti, the UN and the Organization of American States (OAS) jointly launched the International Civilian Mission in Haiti (MICIVIH), for which the staffing, direction, and financing were to be shared between the UN and the OAS. Strictly speaking, this was initially purely a US operation, which was later converted into a UN operation.

When and if the regional organisations don the mantle of regional peacekeepers, the nature and scope of their involvement will need to be crystallised. The past experiences of a number of regional organisations in this regard need to be analysed to identify strengths and weaknesses and to recommend possible measures to streamline the process. A critical evaluation of the future prospects of regional arrangements for peacekeeping will further assist in deciding the type of relationship and the extent of cooperation/integration between the UN and the regional groupings.

Analysis of Certain Regional Peacekeeping Organisations: Strengths and Weaknesses

African Region

Africa has a fairly large number of effective regional organisations—the OAU, now AU, and a number of subregional organisations, some of which have contributed to peacekeeping in their own regions. Africa can be divided into five main subregions, each hosting a subregional organisation:

Arab Maghreb Union	UMA (North)
South African Development Community	SADC (South)
East African Corporation	EAC (East)
Economic Community of West African States	ECOWAS (West)
Economic Community of Central African States	ECCAS (Centre)

The OAU has contributed positively in various peace processes in Africa, which includes a number of successful diplomatic negotiations and arbitrations. However, in the face of the enormity of the crisis like the one witnessed in Rwanda, the OAU could not do much to contain violence against humanity. Amongst the subregional set-ups, ECOWAS and SADC have done creditably well in their respective areas. Yet, the African regional organisations have not developed adequate capability to act without considerable UN support. This is mainly because of a paucity of funds and resources. Also, in many cases, troops involved in such tasks were ill led, lacked motivation, and in some cases became part of the problem themselves.

European Region

The other regional and subregional arrangements for conflict resolution in Europe are the EU, WEU, and OSCE. The significant point to note is that regional organisations and arrangements no longer act in isolation but together in a closely co-coordinated and mutually reinforcing fashion.

The experiment of NATO in Kosovo was mired in many controversies, in that it went forward with its air war without obtaining UN Security Council approval. This is the greatest danger involved in growing reliance on regional organisations. Had the Security Council given the "green signal" prior to the launch of the operations, probably the NATO action may have been seen as more acceptable to the international community, since it would have been legitimised as having been undertaken in the interest of the greater good of protecting thousands of terrorised people. NATO continues to remain the most potent regional force in Europe and is expanding.

West Asian Region

In the Middle East, Jordan has been actively involved in all working groups of the multilateral component, which provides a broad framework for the future of the region and is intended as a complement to the bilateral component. In December 1994, a decision was made by all parties to establish a regional security centre in Amman with related facilities in both Qatar and Tunisia. The concept of establishing a conflict prevention / regional security centre was first introduced and presented by Jordan. However, the arms control and regional security process has been superseded because the co-sponsors of the peace process (the United States and Russia) could not get all parties to agree on introducing structural arms control.

Asian Region

The experiments in South Asia and South-East Asia as regards regional powers / regional organisations taking the lead in peacekeeping efforts have not met with any significant success, so far. Interventions of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka, a purely bilateral arrangement at the invitation of and with the consent of the host country, failed to achieve the desired result. Pakistan did play her role in Afghanistan, but the whole effort has been dubious and has been tragically counter-productive.

The capabilities of regional organisations like the South Asia Foundation (SAF), South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation Forum (APEC) in terms of tackling a conflict situation in their respective regions prove that they have been inadequate. This is because the primary focus of such regional organisations was basically economic development although, increasingly, such organisations are trying to assume a role of preventive diplomacy.

In Central Asia, there are several relatively young regional arrangements that have a potential for peacekeeping roles, such as the

Commonwealth of Independent States	CIS
Central Asian Economic Community	CAEC
"Shanghai Five" or the "Shanghai Forum"	SF

The SF is a successor to Soviet-Chinese border talks between China and the four newly independent states—Kazakhstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgistan (following the break-up of the USSR). However, from the point of view of the UN Charter, the SF is not a regional arrangement or agency in the sense of Chapter 8.

The CAEC, having four former Soviet Central Asian Republics except Turkmenistan, has some formal attributes of a regional organisation. However, lack of adequate defence capabilities, compounded

by insufficient mutual confidence and trust, negates any attempt to jointly stand for audacious peacekeeping efforts. The Central Asian Peacekeeping Battalions (CENTRASBAT), originally made up of troops of Kazakhstan, Kyrgistan, and Uzbekistan, is paid for by NATO through the Partnership for Peace Programme. The declared goal of this endeavour is to promote co-operation between the participating countries' militaries and to provide a capability that would be made available for UN peacekeeping when the need arises.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Regional Arrangements vis-à-vis UN Forces

There is no escaping the fact that the strife-torn world is going to remain in the same state, if not a worse one, in the foreseeable future. The resources of the UN are going to prove to be more and more inadequate. Under such circumstances, the UN would have to depend on regional arrangements. Let us therefore examine the advantages and disadvantages that regional arrangements have vis-à-vis UN forces.

Advantages

a. *Clearer Perspective of Local Conflicts.* Regional forces tend to have a better understanding of the history of the region and therefore have a clear perception of the root causes of local conflicts. Besides, parties to the conflict sometimes view forces from outside as strangers to the situation, whereas a regional force might be viewed differently and hence have more chances of success.

b. *No Inhibitions to Undertake Peace Enforcement Duties.* Some of the regional conflicts necessitate enforcement actions. These fall under the definition of peace enforcement, and many troop contributors to the UN hesitate to take part in such operations. In such scenarios, regional organisations with requisite political and military capability can prove to be valuable.

c. *Similarity of Training Standards.* Another aspect is the similarity of the standards of training and physical and mental make-up of the personnel taking part in the operations as part of regional arrangements.

d. *Legitimacy and Credibility.* For an organisation or force to succeed in peacekeeping or humanitarian assistance operations, legitimacy and credibility are the key. A UN force comprised of countries who have no relation or relevance in the context of the conflict or crisis has little to justify by way of legitimacy, as against a regional force which, by virtue of its regional location and security concerns, can identify and relate to the crisis. The support and confidence that such a force can generate from the warring factions and population far surpass those of a multinational force that is from outside the region.

e. *Desire for Regional Stability.* Countries in close proximity of the conflict have a greater desire in ensuring regional stability, lest it spill over and destabilise the whole region. With ethnic and religious affinity far surpassing national identity, spillover of conflicts to consume the whole region is a potential danger.

This acts as a strong incentive to contribute to peace initiatives in the region and is a motivating factor for regional organisations.

f. *Balanced Response.* Countries in the region have a better feel for the issue and the root causes of the conflict. Cultural and ethnic affinities and proximity have a role to play in understanding the issues. Hence, their response is likely to be more balanced and apt vis-à-vis multinational forces or organisations from out of the region.

g. *Role of Regional Leaders.* Coupled with the understanding of the issues is the fact that the regional leaders would be personally acquainted with the leaders of the warring factions, making it easier to interact, negotiate, and be involved in conflict prevention or conflict resolution.

h. *Early Warning of Potential Flash Points.* Proximity to the source of conflict and regular interaction with the target country help regional organisations to obtain early warning to identify a potential flash point and inform and update the UN of the situation before it explodes into a crisis. This could help in conflict prevention rather than being reactive in conflict resolution.

i. *Wider Information and Intelligence Base.* Intelligence is key before launching any such operations. The regional players' information and intelligence database would far surpass that of other organisations, and their participation and co-operation are hence critical.

j. *Interoperability.* For military or peacekeeping operations to succeed, interoperability is a major factor. Communications, language, and methods of conducting operations are vital for the success of a mission. A regional force which has trained and operated earlier as a coherent force can perform better than a force comprised of troops from a grouping of nations which have got together for the first time in the conflict zone.

k. *Preventive Diplomacy and Deployment.* While conflict resolution is an important function of the UN, the more important facet would be conflict prevention. A regional organisation with a high level of acceptability to all parties concerned could contribute to preventive diplomatic efforts and deployment. The acceptability of a UN force in the early stages of the conflict, where negotiations are still a possibility, is far less than that of a regional organisation.

l. *Cultural Sensitivity.* Language, customs and traditions, ethnic similarity, and religious affinity play a major part in acceptability of a force into the country. The need for interpreters, communication, and understanding religious norms, customs, and traditions is an inhibitor for the force. Use of a regional force can mitigate this factor to a very large extent.

m. *Facilitation of Postconflict Reconstruction.* While UN involvement in a crisis-ridden country provides a focal point for international support and resources, regional and subregional organisations/arrangements can be very useful in launching peace-building activities. Co-operation between the UN and such organisations can facilitate postconflict reconstruction. Such co-operation also provides both

entities with an exit strategy, allowing either putting in place or managing successor arrangements that can continue the work begun by the peacekeeping operation.

Disadvantages

Involving regional organisations in peacekeeping/enforcement operations may also have some disadvantages. The major ones are as given below:

a. *Lack of Political Will.* Lack of political will on the part of the organisations may jeopardise the peacekeeping operations.

b. *Conflicting Interests.* Conflicting national interests and lack of mutual trust amongst the member countries of the regional organisations may vitiate the fragile framework of the peace process.

c. *Lack of Military Capability and Resources.* This may result in deadlocks when the regional organisations are switched into action without adequate preparations.

d. *Hidden Agenda/Influence of Regional Big Power(s).* Even in the regional arrangements, one cannot rule out hidden agendas and the undue influence of the regional big power(s) in the decision-making process.

e. *Possibility of Marginalisation of the UN.* Overreliance on powerful regional organisations in UN peacekeeping operations may result in such organisations becoming overconfident and at times attempting to marginalise the UN itself. NATO and the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) are cases in point. Dangers of powerful regional organisations are highlighted by Brahimi in his recently published report, wherein he states, "Powerful regional organisation shows a willingness of major powers to commit their own troops as well as massive funds to enforcement even without Security Council Authorisation in Europe, while refusing to send troops to or pay assessments for UN operations dealing with more brutal and intense conflicts in Africa."

f. *Problems of Command and Control.* However effective and efficient it may be, there is always the possibility of the joint effort between the UN and regional organisation(s) floundering due to command and control problems and deadlocks in the decision-making process in critical situations. Sierra Leone is a glaring example of this.

g. *Reduced Credibility of the UN.* The UN continues to be the primary organisation for conflict prevention and resolution. However, major roles played by regional organisations could lead to the UN losing its relevance and countries losing faith in the organisation. The role of NATO in the Balkans, though it has its apparent advantages, gives the impression of the UN being defunct.

h. *Single-State Dominance / Rise of Regional Hegemonic Powers.* Regional organisations have the inherent danger of a single state dominating the organisation. A regional organisation may have a predominant member, which could jeopardise the efforts to serve its own ends and emerge as a regional hegemon if its national interests predominate re-

gional interests. The Nigerian example in Sierra Leone goes to prove this point.

i. *Lack of Acceptability.* While acceptability of regional organisations is a major factor, it can be an inhibiting one. In Rwanda, the Francophone countries of Senegal, Mali, Chad, and Guinea had a low level of acceptability by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) government, due to the perceived links to the Hutu government. The RPF government insisted that these countries be the first to leave in the phasing out of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). There were reservations against the Zambian troops on ethnic grounds.

j. *Untimely Withdrawal of Troops.* This fear always exists, thereby compromising the whole effort. The regional organisations may pull out if they find their interests not being served or their view not being accepted by the UN with regard to the final outcome of the conflict, and this can jeopardise the whole effort. The unscheduled pull-out of ECOMOG from Sierra Leone is one such example, where the gains made were neutralised by their withdrawal.

k. *Lack of Expertise and Equipment.* Forces of regional organisations who have not conducted operations of a UNPK nature earlier would lack the expertise and equipment to handle complex contingencies.

l. *Cultural and Social Impact.* The ethnic, cultural, and regional affinities could have a cultural and social impact on the local population, especially where human rights violations, mass movement of refugees, and displaced persons predominate operations. These impacts have to be examined before deploying regional forces.

Recommendations for Streamlining Procedures for Utilisation of Regional Peacekeeping Organisations

In order to overcome the drawbacks/disadvantages of regional arrangements for UNPK operations, the following measures could be adopted:

a. *No Compromise in Selecting the Regional Organisation.* The criteria for entrusting the UNPK operation to a regional organisation should be carefully worked out and adhered to by the UN. Any compromise in this regard will not only undermine the reputation of the organisation but also jeopardise the whole mission.

b. *Foolproof Decision-Making Mechanism.* The mechanism for decision making should be absolutely foolproof in the case of joint operations by the UN and the regional organisations.

c. *Encouragement of Regional Initiatives.* The UN should endeavour to continue to support the initiative of the regional organisations for political and strategic direction and give the required technical assistance and logistics support. There is, however, a need for targeting such efforts on the countries having the requisite political will, military might, and regional standing so that they are not found wanting when called upon to deliver.

d. *Upholding Regional Awareness.* Regional organisations should use

their advantage of being more familiar with local conditions and the socioeconomic, cultural, and political environment than the UN to break barriers and uphold their status as pacesetters in this challenge.

e. *Participation by Big Powers.* Member countries should endeavour to demonstrate practical commitment in full readiness to support and contribute forces for active participation in conjunction with regional forces. Unfortunately, First World countries never do.

f. *Financial Support.* There should be regular financial contributions to sustain regional organisations' funding for future operations.

g. *Avoidance of Unwanted Interference.* The bigger nations in the operations should not unduly influence issues in the deliberations on the peace effort. Nations on the sidelines who do not commit troops are the ones who normally make the most noise.

Conclusion

Apart from a host of other factors, one of the main reasons for the transference of peacekeeping to regional organisations is that the donor states are no longer willing to commit their troops to dangerous operations. This syndrome came to a head in Somalia with the killing of US peacekeepers. The savage murder of 10 Belgian soldiers in Rwanda probably sealed the fate of such commitments to Third World countries.

It is evident that, given the fact that the UN is always strapped for resources and that donor states, especially from the First World, are reluctant to commit their troops, except in their own backyards, the future trend for peacekeeping is likely to see greater involvement of regional organisations.

New concepts of peace incline towards regional organisations playing a more prominent role in association with the UN. OAU has performed peacekeeping operations in Liberia, Congo, and Sierra Leone, as have the OAS in Haiti, CIS in Georgia, and ASEAN in East Timor; NATO has taken on similar tasks in the former Yugoslavia.

There are presently only a few regional organizations around the world involved in UNPK operations (NATO, CIS, SADC, ECOWAS, etc.), yet there are many organisations that could be used to help in times of crisis. Some regional organisations were formed for collective security reasons, others for economic reasons, and still others for trade and development. For whatever purposes they may have been formed, they have a common duty to perform and can help immensely in bringing about peace and stability in their respective regions.

The advantages of using regional organisations must be assessed correctly in consideration of the inherent drawbacks in this arrangement. The UN has an important role to play in strengthening the efforts of regional organisations in overcoming their weaknesses. ❑

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author cultivated in the freedom of expression, academic environment of Air University. They do not reflect the official position of the U.S. Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force or the Air University.