

The Need for UN Police

By Don Kraus | June 5, 2003

The aftermath of the Iraq War has shown us that good soldiers are not always good cops. They cannot replace a professional international police force able to rapidly deploy and reestablish the rule of law in post-conflict hot spots. Most Iraqis would tell you the world needs such a force right now. The United Nations should be tasked with making this a reality.

Why not use the soldiers to do this work? U.S. armed forces are arguably the best-trained military in the world. But they are not trained to apprehend criminals, escort children to school, or calm a hungry, riot-prone mob. Additionally, diverting an already overextended U.S. military to do police work means extending the time reservists are called away from home. Finally, international civil servants are perceived as more impartial than troops. This is essential because law officers cannot operate without the support of the community they are policing.

Iraq is the most recent conflict to spawn a breakdown of law and order in its aftermath. The U.S. has faced this problem in Panama, Haiti, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, but has yet to craft a solution. A step in this direction has been taken in the form of bipartisan legislation introduced in Congress by Reps. Jim McGovern (D-MA) and Amo Houghton (R-NY) to establish a UN Civilian Police Corps (UNCPC), the “International Rule of Law and Antiterrorism Act.”

Why the UN? The UN is the only international body that represents all of the nations of the world. It already has the infrastructure that, with improvement, could administer a UN civilian police corp. A force of well-trained international civil servants would compliment the UN’s core capacity to deliver humanitarian aid and reconstruct war-torn nations. A UN Civilian Police Corps could protect relief workers, schools, and hospitals. They could keep roads, airports, and businesses open. UN cops could arrest war criminals and small-scale spoilers who attempt to re-ignite hostilities.

A UNCPC would help to rectify one of the UN’s underlying flaws, its culture of “peace and neutrality.” Peace is not just the absence of war; it is the presence

of law and justice. Lawbreakers cannot be treated with neutrality, but rather with impartiality. Either you are obeying the law or you are not. By giving the UN the resources to enforce the law in nations where local governments cannot or will not, the UN would mature and become a much more viable and useful institution.

Is the United Nations up to this job? Not yet. Sufficient political will on the part of the United States and other major nations is required to revamp the UN’s current ad hoc civilian policing model that currently take too long to deploy police—who are often under-trained, over-paid, and poorly motivated. Steps in the right direction have already been initiated at the UN, but much more is needed. This would be a worthwhile investment of U.S. clout.

Had a UN Civilian Police Corps existed in March 2003, military planners could have created an option that, once the fighting started, would have called for a quick Security Council resolution to allow UN civilian police to enter Iraqi cities on the heels of the coalition forces. This could have minimized post-war damage, protected the chain of evidence at mass graves, and secured museums. It is likely that such a resolution would have passed and dramatically changed how subsequent debates played out in New York, as many Security Council members have linked their national interests to defining a credible role for the UN in Iraq.

There is concern that once given this capacity the United Nations would be relegated to acting as a clean-up squad for American “imperialist” adventures. But the tangible relief and security that UN police could provide to the citizens of ravaged



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nations—regardless of who started the war—would outweigh this risk to the UN’s reputation.

It is clear that no one wants the United States to play the role of global cop. But it is equally clear that an interdependent world needs professional, international civil servants that can bring law to shattered societies. A UNCPC could protect international workers in Afghanistan, who receive little protection outside of Kabul. UN cops could investigate the atrocities currently being committed in the Congo, where one thousand civilians were massacred last month. UN police might even play a role in tracking down al Qaeda members in nations that will not allow access to U.S. personnel. The United Nations should have the capacity to perform this task. The United States should lead the effort to turn this need into a reality.

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International Rule of Law and Antiterrorism Act
[http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d108:h.r.01414:](http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/z?d108:h.r.01414)

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