

# Getting Peacekeeping Right at the G-8

By Don Kraus | June 7, 2004

Begin with the assumption the Bush administration will do the right thing...only after it has exhausted all the other options. The Sea Island Group of 8 (G-8) Summit provides President Bush, after years of disdain, the opportunity to get peacekeeping right. Buried in the Sea Island agenda is an initiative to double the world-wide number of trained and equipped peacekeepers and international police over the next five years.

This couldn't come at a better time. With new peace operations started in Haiti and Burundi and a likely new mission in southern Sudan, the United Nations is now managing 14 missions with about sixty thousand peacekeepers. These operations, combined with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have stretched nations who have contributed troops to their limits. Current missions are sparsely staffed, and the international community has little additional capacity to take on further responsibilities in protecting civilians or enforcing peace agreements.

In fact additional peacekeepers are desperately needed right now. Today, ten years after Rwanda, innocents are once again being slaughtered in the world's latest tragedy in the Darfur region of Sudan. And yet the international community is no better equipped to respond to genocide than it was in 1994. Over the past fifteen months, 30,000 people have lost their lives in Darfur. Government-sponsored militias accused of 'ethnic cleansing' are continuing their attacks and the rainy season will hamper relief efforts. Andrew Natsios, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, said that if immediate action is not taken, one million could die by the end of the year, matching the death toll of Rwanda. It is imperative that the UN and regional security organizations have the resources and political capacity to prevent, respond, and rebuild when civilians are caught up in the horrors of war and ethnic cleansing.

The Bush plan, called the Global Peace Operations Initiative, does not specifically call for training UN peacekeepers, but the UN and regional organizations such as the African Union and NATO will be the beneficiaries of additional capacity. With two-thirds

of the Bush initiatives resources slated for Africa, that war torn continent will be better able to quell its own conflicts and provide peacekeepers for UN missions.

However, it is uncertain whether President Bush will be able to overcome his disregard for peacekeeping and "nation-building," which his Defense department has renamed "stability operations." Nor is it clear that other G-8 participants will embrace the proposal. The President's plan calls for the United States to pay for about 45% of the effort. Rumbblings of "unfunded mandate" can already be heard from across the Atlantic even though the plan allows for funders to determine which nations will participate in the program.

Even greater threats to the initiative are the mixed messages coming out of Washington and the general atmospherics surrounding President Bush's relationship with his G-8 counterparts. The summit occurs in the context of the largest rift the transatlantic alliance has had in its sixty year history, with Iraq exasperating already existing tensions. German, French, and Russian leaders will not be inclined to grant any favors to the President that will enhance his chances of re-election in November. Ongoing Security Council negotiations regarding Iraqi sovereignty could severely impact G-8 agreements.

Also in the background is an upcoming Security Council debate to renew a resolution granting all peacekeepers immunity from the International Criminal Court (ICC). This resolution was grudgingly accepted twice before only because of a U.S. threat to veto peacekeeping missions if Security Council members didn't tow the line. Although an attempt by

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the U.S. to pass the renewal earlier this month was dropped in the shadow of the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal, it is expected to be taken up again before the end of June. G-8 members Great Britain, France, Germany, Canada, and Italy are all Court supporters.

Further complicating the issue is the United States' global campaign to secure bilateral immunity agreements to insulate it from the ICC. Current U.S. law sanctions nations that will not sign these agreement by withholding all military assistance. President Bush has invited six African leaders to meet with G-8 leaders on June 10th, including South African President Mbeki. South Africa, along with Benin, Lesotho, Niger, Mali, Namibia and Tanzania have refused to sign immunity agreements and therefore are ineligible to receive U.S. military assistance even if the President's initiative moves forward.

The Global Peace Operations Initiative will probably come too late for the people of Darfur. However, G-8 members should not allow it to become a victim of bad politics. President Bush has taken the world on a torturous ride to get here, but his initiative is an extremely constructive step that will bring our world much closer the dream of "never again" really meaning never again.

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