

Britain proposes UN "peacekeeping" cover for great power military interventions

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Britain has submitted a report calling for a major revision of United Nations "peacekeeping" operations to the organisation's Millennium Summit in New York. The summit, which runs from Wednesday to Friday, will assemble at least 150 heads of state from every continent to discuss the role of the UN in the twenty-first century.

The British submission was drawn up by the Labour government and the opposition Liberal Democrats in a Joint Cabinet Committee on foreign policy. It is framed as a response to a critical report on UN operations submitted last month by UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan. Drafted by former Algerian foreign minister Lakhdar Brahimi, Annan's report sought to counter criticisms that the UN had proven ineffective in recent operations in the Balkans and Africa.

UN peacekeepers have suffered a series of humiliating setbacks, as in Sierra Leone earlier this year when 500 blue helmets were taken hostage by the rebel Revolutionary United Front. Moreover, the US refused to wait on a UN mandate before commencing its bombing mission against Yugoslavia last year—preferring to bypass the body due to the influence of Russia and France within it—and assert its interests through NATO. The US has long been dissatisfied with the UN and regularly fails to pay promised finance. In May, the Blair government similarly bypassed the UN when it dispatched British troops to Sierra Leone to intervene on behalf of the Kabbah government in the civil war.

The UN's crisis was deepened by the fact that its "peacekeeping" missions have failed to prevent human rights abuses, and in the case of Kosovo have been widely accused of facilitating them. The entry of UN forces gave a green light for Albanian separatists to carry through the ethnic cleansing of Serbs and Roma

from the province.

Brahimi's report, which will be discussed at the Summit, is aimed at accommodating the UN to the growing demands of the major powers for an organisation more responsive to their immediate interests. To this end his report states openly that the UN can no longer act as a "neutral" force in its peacekeeping operations, but must be partisan against those regimes deemed to be the aggressor, i.e., it would have an explicitly anti-Hussein mandate in Iraq or an anti-Milosevic mission in Serbia/Kosovo.

As to the problems of financing and political divisions between the member countries, Brahimi proposes that each UN member state should take responsibility for training and equipping their own military units, which could be used to provide contingents for UN missions.

The sweeping proposals essentially mean the UN will provide a flag of convenience for military adventures by the major powers who will be able to assemble their own national force, equipped with blue helmets, to be sent into any chosen area under the guise of UN "peacekeeping".

Recognising the far-reaching implications of these proposals, the UK has seized the opportunity to press forward its own agenda. An article in the *Financial Times*, September 4, co-authored by Foreign Secretary Robin Cook and Liberal Democrat Foreign Affairs spokesman Menzies Campbell, presents the UK report as an addition to Brahimi's report.

Calling for a "revised role" for the UN, the article praises the UK's "crucial role" in the UN Security Council command, pointing to its "pivotal part in support of UN operations in Kosovo, East Timor and Sierra Leone". Whilst welcoming much of Brahimi's report, Cook and Campbell state that "in the light of the

experience” in Sierra Leone “further initiatives” are needed.

The UK's unilateral decision to send 1,000 troops to Sierra Leone to support the pro-government forces in the civil war was justified with “humanitarian” rhetoric. Its real aim was to secure control of the lucrative diamond mines in Britain's former colony. Cook and Campbell argue that the UN should formally endorse similar interventions. They add that UN missions require “more robust rules of engagement” so that they do not “lose the initiative to hostile elements as they have in the past”. The most important task facing the UN is to “identify the circumstances in which we should get involved in other people's conflicts”, the authors state, quoting Prime Minister Blair.

In order to answer accusations that the UN is a select club, the UK report calls for membership of the UN's five member Security Council to be extended to include Germany, Japan and one member each from Africa, Asia and Latin America. This would “bestow upon it greater legitimacy”, Cook and Campbell state.

This show of international solidarity and regulation is a façade. The two authors argue that what has been established de facto should be made concrete—that “in exceptional circumstances” humanitarian interventions should be “undertaken without the express authority” of the UN Security Council.

In their *Financial Times* article, Cook and Campbell stress that the definition of what constitutes UN “peacekeeping” should also be extended. Besides “restoring the peace”, the UN must be involved in “entrenching the peace”, they state. As in Kosovo and East Timor, the UN should be able to draw up and impose a “full economic, social and political programme” on the region or country into which they intervene, as well as selecting—either by training or importing—“policemen and judges, economic planners and administrators”.

Cook and Campbell's proposals are nothing less than a blueprint for colonial-style takeover of whatever country Britain deems appropriate—all under a UN mandate of course. So as to facilitate its plans, the UK report proposes the establishment of an international military college, which it modestly suggests should be based in Britain. Speaking on BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme, Cook said, “We have got to improve the

quality of the peacekeeping forces and that is why we have proposed there should be a UN staff college to continue to carry out training on peacekeeping. We suggest that Britain would be a very logical place to have it because of our own expertise in peacekeeping and our commitment to the UN.”



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