Conflict Avoidance and Mitigation: Thoughts on the Role of Defense Forces

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Executive Summary

The role of the military has been associated with the use of force, but it is important for the military to refrain from the use of force, and focus on conflict prevention. Conflicts today are predominately intra-national; however, conflicts have the potential to become international if not prevented. There are different stages of conflict including conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peace building. The role of the military should focus on mitigating violence once it begins. However, the role of the military differs at the intra-state and inter-state levels. In intra-state conflicts, militaries can promote peace building by helping the national government address the root causes of conflict, and aid the government through peacekeeping operations. Inter-state conflicts can be overcome by the development of confidence building measures (CBM) to reduce misperception and suspicion. States can promote CBM's through declaratory, transparency, and constraints measures to deal with uncertainty, and to reassure other states of a country's intentions.

The soldier is not simply a war fighter, but is also a diplomat. The military is the fourth track of diplomacy behind civil society and groups. The military should have a greater role in the promotion of dialogue, and promotion of CBMs to support Foreign Ministry objectives. One venue for greater military and Foreign Ministry involvement is the ASEAN Regional Forum Defense Officials Meeting (ARF-DOM). This venue should promote discussion among the military and foreign ministers.

Another venue is the defense official's dialogue (DOD). If expanded, this dialogue could achieve further cooperation among defense ministers of participating states. One area of cooperation is disaster response. Asia-Pacific states should develop an Asia-Pacific Regional Disaster Response Force; however, the defense and foreign ministers of participating states oppose the creation of this entity. Another potential area for cooperation is development of regional maritime zone. Defense ministers from individual states should establish maritime security mechanisms and consult other states to collaborate with other agencies.

One forum for greater collaboration between defense ministers and foreign ministers is the ASEAN Regional Forum Defense Ministries Dialogue (ARFDMD). Another is the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and a third is the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS) Shangri-La dialogue. These multilateral meetings of defense ministers can promote defense and foreign minister dialogue on important issues in the Asia Pacific.

Another way to promote conflict prevention is for militaries to recognize diversity and heterogeneity in their societies, and to assimilate diverse cultural communities into mainstream culture. The military should practice restraint and refrain from the use of force against minority parties within the state. It is important to distinguish the motivations of the different groups within a state engaged in conflict. Assessing whether a group is fighting for a political goal, or for survival, is necessary in determining the correct response to conflict.

The soldier's main goals should be to prevent the recurrence of violent conflict, promote peace building, and manage violence. Management of violence necessitates

knowing how to fight, and also knowing conflict resolution. The image of the solder as a peacemaker is a challenge and a goal to pursue. The military is useful in establishing viable institutions in the aftermath of conflict where military forces reconstruct a damaged city. Soldiers are charged with peacekeeping either by controlling or resolving conflict, and ensuring the safe delivery of humanitarian relief. Peace enforcement involves maintaining peace and security, by either ensuring a cease fire or enforcing sanctions within a state. If a state collapses it is the international community's responsibility to protect the people from violence and ensure humanitarian assistance. However, intervention is complex. There is legitimate intervention and outright interference. Non-interference is a core principle of humanitarian assistance, but situations become complicated when foreign militaries enter a territory and come into conflict with the military force of that state.

Conflict Avoidance and Mitigation
Thoughts on the Role of Defense Forces*

By Raymund Jose G. Quilop**

I

Too often, people tend to equate the military with force. Therefore, those in the military service are seen as experts in using force and – to put it bluntly – in knowing nothing but to use such force – at least, so some argue. This view is rooted in the basic principle that the military is the state's instrument in exercising its legitimate right to use coercive authority.

I beg to disagree. While the military is the tool to be used by a political leadership to exercise the state's legitimate coercive authority, that does not automatically mean that the military is all about using force. Having interacted with various military organizations and military personnel (specifically with the Armed Forces of the Philippines), I say that quite to the contrary, militaries as much as possible want to avoid using force, knowing too well the harsh consequences of using it on their organization, their personnel, and even on the public. Yes, it is true that militaries prepare to use force. But it does not mean that preparing to use force equates with knowing *only* about using force.

Having said that, let me emphasize that preparing to use force is no longer solely confined to preparing how to use it per se. What is also now included are preparations on how to avoid using force. And the most effective way to avoid using force is to avoid the very reason that force has to be used – the presence of conflict. Hence, it is a welcome development that the topic of conflict avoidance is included in a conference that brings together the chiefs of defense of Asia-Pacific countries.

But can conflict that results when incompatible goals are pursued by peoples and groups and which sociologists say, is part and parcel of life, a natural feature of human interaction, really be avoided? It is interesting to note that, for some observers, "many conflicts are positive and some are indeed necessary. Without conflicts, there would be no struggle for freedom, no democracy, no human maturity, and no diversity."[1] Without differences, which is what underpins conflict, things would be the same and life would be boring.

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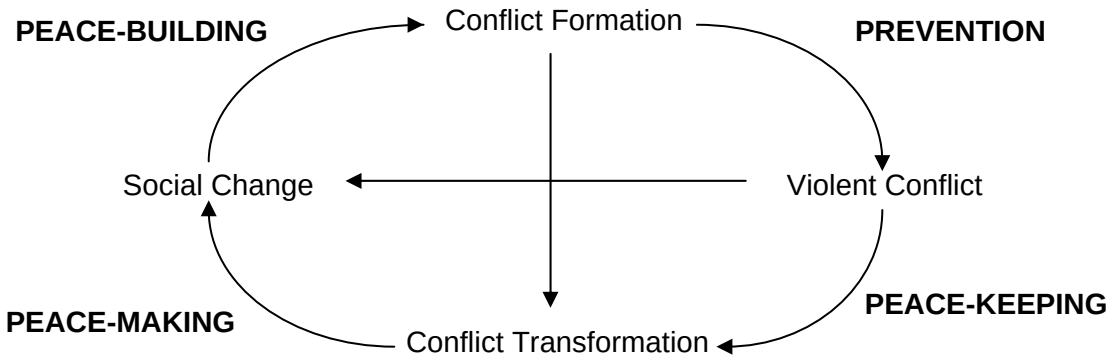
[1] Jan Oberg, "Conflict Mitigation in Reconstruction and Development" found at www.gmu.edu/acadmics/pcs/oberg.htm, p.1.

Life would be stale and uninteresting without differences. I would rather see diversity than have uniformity. Unfortunately, differences do not merely remain differences; diversity does not simply remain a description of a state of affairs. There are instances, and numerous occasions at that, when differences result in armed confrontation, either between individuals, groups, or states. In such situations, diversity ceases to be simply a condition of things but has become the cause of violent engagement between parties.

Some conflicts are rooted in differences about beliefs and methods of achieving a particular goal. And a situation becomes worse when the conflict is between two states, as this would almost automatically involve their militaries. The two world wars and various inter-state wars that have occurred through out humanity's existence attest to this.

Today, while the possibility of another global war may be remote, at least the way I see things, violent conflicts between states remain a possibility. There exists too many reasons why this is so. What is also bothersome is the fact that "although most conflicts today are intra-national, they are all displaying inter-national conflict potentials."[2]

Conflict appears to be part and parcel of existence – so much so that experts refer to the so-called life cycle of conflict or the "progression from peaceful social change to conflict formation to violent conflict and then to conflict transformation and back to peaceful social change" once again.



People who study conflict have identified various forms of intervention in each of the four stages in the life cycle of conflict: prevention to keep the conflict from becoming violent; peace-keeping after violent conflict occurs; peacemaking to ensure that the conflict gets transformed into a positive tool for social change; and peace building to prevent conflicts from being formed once more.

Conflict avoidance is integral in the phase of preventing the formation of conflict while conflict mitigation is necessary after violent conflict has erupted or between the phases of violent conflict and conflict transformation.

[2] *Ibid*, p. 4.

Having briefly examined the so-called life-cycle of conflict, how conflicts could be avoided and what role could military forces play in helping avoid conflict is the first order question that needs to be examined. The second order question pertains to the role of militaries in mitigating violence once conflict has arisen between two parties.

A bit of caution is necessary, however. In examining the role of the military in conflict avoidance and conflict mitigation, one needs to bear in mind the two categories of conflict: inter-state and intra-state conflict. I keep this distinction in mind because what needs to be emphasized differs when it comes to the role of militaries in these two categories of conflict. As I will discuss below, building confidence among militaries allows military forces to play a role in inter-state conflict. In intra-state conflicts, militaries can make a contribution by helping the national government address the underlying causes of conflict and aid in avoiding and mitigating conflict. Depending on the circumstances, foreign militaries could also help in development work or in what are now known as peace-keeping operations.

II

Regarding inter-state conflict, one key step to help avoid conflict is building confidence among the actors or parties involved; this explains the usefulness of what are known as confidence building measures (CBMs). We all know how CBMs played an important role in defusing tension between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War period and de-escalating what could have been a more intense arms race between the two superpowers.

Conventionally, CBMs include a variety of measures meant to communicate to concerned states the true character of a military activity so that these activities not be seen as threatening, and thereby reassuring other states.[3] By reducing misperception and suspicion, they help lessen the probability of armed confrontation.[4] They come in three classes: declaratory measures, transparency measures, and constraint measures.

In a more contemporary sense, CBMs could be seen in a broader sense to include "both formal and informal measures, whether unilateral, bilateral or multilateral that address, prevent or resolve uncertainties among states, including both military and political elements."[5] Indeed, CBMs could help states deal with uncertainty, which prevails around the globe.

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[3] M. Susan Pederson and Stanley Weeks, "A Survey of Confidence and Security Building Measures," in Ralph A. Cossa, editor, *Asia-Pacific Confidence and Security Building Measures* (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, [1995]), p. 82.

[4] J. Soedjati Djiwandono, "Confidence-Building Measures and Preventive Diplomacy: A Southeast Asian Perspective," *CSCAP Newsletter*, October 1996, p. 4.

[5] Ralph A. Cossa, "Asia-Pacific Confidence and Security Building Measures," in Thangam Ramnath (eds.), *The Emerging Regional Security Architecture in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Institute for Strategic and International Studies, 1996), p. 428.

CBMs are considered useful in the practice of preventive diplomacy which as former UN Secretary General Boutros Boutros Ghali spelled out, is about "prevent[ing} disputes from arising between parties, prevent[ing] existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and limit[ing] the spread of the latter when they occur."[6] In fact, CBMs, together with institution building, norm-building, early warning, and preventive humanitarian action are classified as pre-crisis or peacetime (those undertaken before the onset of a conflict) preventive diplomacy measures. In addition to pre-crisis measures are so-called crisis time preventive diplomacy measures, which include fact-finding missions, goodwill missions, good offices of a third party or mediation, and crisis management.[7]

Looking at the confidence building measures and preventive diplomacy measures outlined above, militaries obviously play or could play a role in all of them. But what I would like to focus on is the role played by military personnel in the area of diplomacy. This is rooted in my belief that military personnel nowadays are no longer simply soldiers but they are also diplomats.

Of course, this is not totally new. Soldiers have always been involved in diplomacy, hence the term military diplomacy. In the past, though, this idea was seen more in terms of the sense that a strong military force backed up a state's foreign policy. While this tenet remains true, I believe that the military's involvement in diplomacy is no longer simply about providing the military capability to support a state's foreign policy agenda; it is now about being involved directly in diplomacy, given the growing intensity and magnitude of the military's involvement in activities and even in institutions that used to be the exclusive purview of foreign service offices. I would note that the military's involvement in diplomacy is the fourth track of diplomacy, in addition to the first track (foreign ministries), second track (think tanks), and third track (civil society groups).

The gathering today is one of those efforts. In the past, meetings like these were reserved for foreign ministry officials, with meetings of military officials being confined to the bilateral level or at most the trilateral level (of course with the exception of officials of multilateral alliances like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)). Today, a multilateral gathering of military officers across the Asia-Pacific even if they are not members of an alliance has become possible.

Believing in the fourth track of diplomacy, I have always advocated the institutionalization of interaction among militaries and defense establishments. I have been arguing for increased participation and an enhanced role for military and defense officials in regional security mechanisms, foremost of which is the ASEAN Regional

[6] See Boutros-Boutros Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping* (New York: United Nations, 1992), p.11.
[7] See Simon SC Tay, *Preventive Diplomacy and the ASEAN Regional Forum: Principles and Possibilities* (Singapore: Institute of Defense and Strategic Studies, 1997), p. 8.

Forum (ARF). In 2002, for example, I noted the following in a research monograph on the ARF:[8]

> It is true that defense officials are actively involved in the various inter-sessional activities as well as the Senior Officials Meetings of the ARF. However, in the annual ARF meeting, the foreign ministers have the primary role, although defense officials could also participate but in a *de facto* secondary status in spite of the ARF being a forum for regional security dialogue, something which is the primary concern of defense officials.
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> Thus, wouldn't it be proper that defense officials, whose primarily concerns are security issues be given a greater role in the over-all ARF process, both at the level of Senior Officials Meeting and the annual meeting of the ARF? In this regard, the proposal to finally institute a defense or security meeting among the ARF participants is timely and appropriate. The regular luncheon meeting among defense officials in the past is no longer sufficient. Instead, a separate meeting of defense officials properly called ARF-Defense Officials Meeting (ARF-DOM) could be more useful. In addition, defense ministers should finally be allowed to sit side by side with their foreign ministry counterparts in the yearly meeting of the ARF. This would pave the way for a sense of "equality" between the foreign ministers and defense ministers of the ARF members.
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> These suggested measures, in particular the holding of a separate meeting for defense officials of ARF members and providing them the opportunity to sit along side their foreign ministry counterparts in the annual ARF meeting, are simple measures to make the ARF truly a forum for security dialogue. More importantly, these measures could also help revitalize the ARF and assist it in moving forward towards the stage of promoting preventive diplomacy measures.
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> The ministers of the ARF participants have acknowledged this. In their 2002 meeting, they "emphasized the importance of the active participation of defense and military officials as well as the engagement of other security officials in the ARF process"[9]. They also "welcomed the initiative to create more opportunities for these officials to interact as they are essential to the confidence building process in the ARF and have proven to be constructive and useful in the exchange of views on issues of common interest."[10]

Fortunately, the path toward this has started to be traversed, with the establishment of the Defense Officials Dialogue (DOD) mechanism with the ARF itself, and the first meeting held in Brunei in 2007, the second in Canada in 2008, and the third in Thailand this year. Now that there exists a defense officials dialogue, beyond the

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[8] Raymund Jose G. Quilop, *Institution Building in the Asia-Pacific: The ARF Experience* (Quezon City: Office of Strategic and Special Studies, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2002).
[9] See the Chairman's Statement, The Ninth Meeting of the ASEAN Regional Forum, Bandar Seri Begawan, July 31, 2002.
[10] *Ibid.*

luncheons that defense officials used to have, they need to maximize the potential of this dialogue platform among the ARF countries' Defense Ministries. The DOD platform should be utilized to examine the potential of furthering cooperation among the Defense Ministries of participating states: the first step would be to identify a specific issue that could serve as a locus of cooperation.

One issue that readily comes to mind is responding to disasters. Initial efforts in this issue area have been undertaken. The ARF-Voluntary Demonstration of Response (ARF-VDR) held in the Philippines last May is one example. In the exercise, it became apparent that while other regional states have the capacity to respond to disasters, the others remain wanting. Thus, defense officials could flesh out how each Defense Ministry could assist each other to further enhance their respective capacities in responding to disasters. Of course, the ultimate goal would be to develop not just a framework for responding to disasters but more importantly the operational capability of defense forces to respond to disasters in a joint and combined manner when necessary.

I look forward to the day when the Asia-Pacific would have a regional disaster response force or unit (composed of several if not all defense forces of Asia-Pacific states) on stand-by, ready and able to act with short notice when called upon by an Asia-Pacific state. While the ARF members' respective Foreign Ministries in consultation with their defense counterparts should take the lead in crafting the framework, it is the task of those from the Defense Ministries in consultation with their Foreign Ministry colleagues to develop the so-called ARF Disaster Response Force.

A second issue that ARF defense officials could focus on is ensuring the safety and security of the region's maritime zones. Taking their cue from the current state of things in the Philippines, in order to ensure effective cooperation in maritime security-related matters, defense officials could focus on examining how best to rationalize and streamline their various agencies involved in maritime security. In the Philippines, for example, there are 30 or so different government agencies that in one way or another are involved in maritime security. An effective regional mechanism for maritime security could only be developed if the individual states' maritime security mechanisms are rationalized and streamlined. Of course, defense officials could only lead the way, so to speak, in streamlining maritime security-related institutions in their own governments. This project could only be effective if done in close collaboration with colleagues in other government agencies.

Returning to the Defense Officials Dialogue, the next step would be to work toward having a Defense Ministers Dialogue or Meeting. The ARF may need to follow the footsteps of its own driver, ASEAN, where a Defense Ministers Meeting, the ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting (ADMM), is now occurring; or perhaps I should say that ASEAN, being the driver of the ARF, should spearhead the establishment of an ARF Defense Ministers Meeting (ARFDMM). The utility of having defense ministers in dialogue with each other is crucial, for they eventually decide on what policies are adopted and implemented in their Defense Ministries.

Every June since 2002, defense ministers of Asia-Pacific states have had the opportunity to meet in Singapore in what is now known as the Asia Security Summit (The Shangri-La Dialogue), through the auspices of the London-based International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS). The existence of this dialogue attests to the fact that it is possible to convene the defense ministers of Asia-Pacific states in a single venue. The ARF could take that cue and build from this defense dialogue mechanism. While defense ministers take part in the Shangri-La Dialogue, they are only able to discuss issues with counterparts in various bilateral meetings that take place during the dialogue. Of course, they meet each other during the plenary sessions where most of them deliver presentations and during the ministerial lunches hosted by the Singapore defense minister. The ARF and the IISS could collaborate closely and explore the possibility or prospects of convening a multilateral meeting of the defense ministers in attendance to the Shangri-La Dialogue. In this multilateral meeting, the defense ministers could have their own ARF Defense Ministers Meeting. Such a set-up would be most cost-effective and time-maximizing for ARF defense ministers. Of course, the multilateral meeting ought to be called the ARF Defense Ministers Meeting.

III

In talking about the role of militaries in the avoidance and mitigation of intra-state conflict, one has to distinguish between the roles played by militaries of governments involved in the conflict and those of foreign militaries.

In diverse or heterogeneous societies (which is almost always the case as there is no totally homogenous society), the most important contribution that their militaries can make toward the avoidance and mitigation of conflict is a change of mindset regarding the recognition and acceptance of cultural diversity and ethnic heterogeneity in their society.[11]

Beyond such recognition, they can work to evolve their society into a multiculturalist one, a society that "cherishes its cultural diversity and makes appropriate adjustments or responses."[12] The approach to be pursued by the government and supported by other stakeholders including the military ought to be what is appropriately termed a "multiculturalist response" that goes beyond the more conventional outlook of assimilating "diverse constituent cultural communities into the mainstream culture."[13]

As a form of political integration, "assimilation … is inherently unsuited to multicultural societies" (like the Philippines) because this mode has the state "abstract[ing] away the class, ethnicity, religion and social status of its citizens, and unit[ing] them in terms of their subscription to a common system of authority."[14]

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[11] Macapado A. Muslim, "Poverty Alleviation and Peace Building in Multiethnic Societies: The Need for a Multiculturalist Governance in the Philippines, *Philippine Journal of Public Administration,* Volume XLIX, Nos 1 and 2 (January-April 2005), p. 68.
[12] *Ibid.*, p. 71.
[13] *Ibid.*, p. 68.
[14] *Ibid.*, p. 69.

Although subscription to a central authority could start the process of having a sense of belonging to a nation, this sense should as much as possible be developed voluntarily among various groups that are supposed to be part of the nation.[15]

Unfortunately, if assimilation is how a government pursues political integration, "ethnic challenge to the monoethnic or mononational state" becomes "unthinkable or unworkable" inducing the state to rely on coercive measures and elite cooption to maintain national unity and relying greatly on the "support of the largest or most powerful ethnic community." This alienates other ethnic groups from the social mainstream instead of integrating them into it.

In more specific terms, a conscious effort on the part of the military to restrain its personnel from using unnecessary force against the other party would go a long way in helping avoid the eruption of armed hostilities. In cases where political negotiations are underway, a declaration from the military's leadership of its support for the political process being undertaken to resolve whatever issue stands between the government and the other party would also contribute to preventing conflict from erupting. This does not mean that the military should not be ready to use force against the party, particularly if the other party is no longer fighting for a political cause but simply for its survival and its actions are no longer for a political goal but are simply criminal acts.

Also crucial is enhancing the capacity of both the military institution and its personnel to contribute to the peaceful and negotiated settlement of the issue. One good thrust to this end is developing an appreciation among military personnel of the value of peace-building work, which could contribute to the management of violence, which as is all too commonly acknowledged, is the core competence of a professional armed force – this what soldiering is all about. By preventing the recurrence of violent conflict, peace building, could be seen as contributing to a soldier's ability to perform his core competence – the management of violence.

As previously mentioned, it is disturbing that soldiering has always been primarily associated with using weapons that kill. As a result, the image of a soldier as a peace worker is difficult to imagine both by the general public and soldiers themselves. The soldier is usually seen as the harbinger of violence and of war, with some members of the military once believing that peace-building would lessen a soldier's ability to prosecute a war.[16]

By identifying support measures and structures to "promote peace and build trust and interaction among former enemies," peace-building could help avoid a relapse into conflict. As is becoming clear, peace-building is not the anti-thesis of soldiering. Managing violence not only necessitates knowing how to fight, but more importantly

[15] Raymund Jose G. Quilop and Kathleen Mae M. Villamin, *Revisiting Mindanao: Taking Stock, Thinking Through and Moving Beyond* (Quezon City: Office of Strategic and Special Studies, Armed Forces of the Philippines, 2009), p. 45.

[16] See Kathline Anne Sigua Tolosa, "Building Bridges: The Soldier as Peacemaker", *OSS Digest*, 1st and 2nd Quarter 2009, pp. 16-21.

having "knowledge on conflict resolution." Initiatives to this end have been undertaken, but they must go beyond the efforts of a mere handful of military officers and ought to be pursued by the entire military establishment, with its training institutions being at the forefront of cultivating this mindset among military officers and personnel.

It is in the area of peace-building where foreign militaries could provide assistance, particularly when the conflict has so devastated the society that most of its institutions lack the capacity to govern. In such a scenario, peace-building through the concept of multinational peace operations would mean "setting up necessary infrastructures aimed at establishing or re-establishing viable state institutions in the aftermath of conflict." Peace-building work could likewise mean involvement of military forces in reconstructing the damaged society or community as well as in development-related work.

Other avenues whereby foreign militaries get involved in mitigating conflicts in certain societies are well known: peace-keeping, peace-enforcement, and peace-making. Peacekeeping activities, which are mainly undertaken through the United Nations, include implementing or monitoring the implementation of arrangements to control or resolve conflict as well as ensuring the safe delivery of humanitarian relief.

Peace enforcement is when an armed force needs to be used to maintain peace and security. Peace-making are initiatives undertaken after a conflict has commenced to establish a ceasefire between the parties involved, and specifically includes application of pressure and sanctions to induce the parties to arrive at a cessation of hostilities, even if only temporary.

Whether one talks of peace-building, peace-keeping, peace enforcement, or peace-making, these activities could be taken collectively as comprising peace support operations (PSOs). As the UN has acknowledged, PSOs include "assisting in political processes, reforming judicial systems, training police forces, disarming and reintegrating former combatants and supporting the return of internally displaced persons" as well as separating warring parties.[17]

The involvement of foreign militaries in mitigating conflict between actors in conflict is rooted in the growing consensus within the community of nations that when states fail in their primary responsibility to protect their own peoples, other states and the international community have the responsibility to protect those people. This is the very essence of humanitarian intervention.[18]

Undertaking humanitarian intervention operations are complex for several reasons. First, there is a very thin line separating legitimate intervention and outright interference in the internal affairs of states, which, if crossed, undermines the core

[17] See UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, "United Nations Peacekeeping Fact Sheet", found at www.un.org/depts/dpko/factsheet.pdf.
[18] See International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Center, 2001).

principle of the modern state system – noninterference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states. Second, when foreign militaries enter the territory of another state in the name of humanitarian intervention, they would necessarily come into conflict with the military force of that state. When this happens, conflict between the military of that state and the intervening military forces ensues, which could result in armed confrontation between them. Thus, instead of conflict being mitigated, it could get worse, thereby turning an intra-national conflict into an inter-state one.

About the Author

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