

NEEDED: A UNITED NATIONS ADMINISTRATIVE ACADEMY

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Why Is an Administrative Academy Needed?

Consider Afghanistan in the years since 1989 when the formidable Soviet army was forced to vacate its decade-long occupation of the country. Although the Afghan *mujahideen* might eventually have achieved that objective without foreign support, the abundant flow of American arms into the country via Pakistan undoubtedly hastened the Soviet defeat. From an American perspective, that outcome climaxed a major battle in the waning days of the Cold War. Three years later the communist regime left behind by the Soviets was overthrown. The job was done. And the Afghan people, about whom so much solicitude had previously been expressed, were soon forgotten. But the civil war raged on.

In 1995 the Taliban took over. Exhausted by the long foreign occupation and internecine strife, most Afghans were willing to accept whatever regime promised to restore some semblance of order. The international community might have anticipated some of what would then ensue, but didn't sufficiently care. And so, at enormous cost a war was won and the peace quickly lost. While the greatest concern of the international community should have been the staggering human toll of that war, one must also take note of financial considerations in that they loom so large in the political calculus of nations. Although we cannot obtain a reliable figure, because so much of the assistance to the Afghan resistance was covertly provided by the CIA, the US Center for Defense Information estimated the cost of arms deliveries in excess of two billion dollars prior to the Taliban takeover.¹

Neglected by most affluent countries and unable, without appropriate outside help, to forge a viable administration, Afghanistan under the Taliban became a haven for al-Qa'ida, whose supporters in various parts of the Islamic world provided the regime some measure of economic support. And then, after several preliminary dramatic acts of terrorism presumably perpetrated by the al-Qa'ida network, there came the horrendous events of September 11. The failure to act prudentially during the window of opportunity opened up in the aftermath of the Cold War helped usher in a new and tremendously costly global struggle, the so-called “war on terrorism,” a war that US President Bush proclaims will be of long, but indefinite duration.

A version of what happened in Afghanistan could also occur in other failed states. Terrorist networks, after all, are an aspect of globalization that emerges in the absence of democracy and stable government. Enlightened self-interest, then, would combine with elementary considerations of humanity in pointing to the need for the world community to promote good and stable governance wherever regimes break down, as many seem likely to do, in coming decades.

Even in respect to Afghanistan, however, where that lesson should, by now, be most clear, it seems not to have been learned. After having spent well over \$15 billion in its high tech assault on the Taliban and al-Qa'ida, the American-led alliance (now with a substantial component from other members of NATO) again shows signs of forfeiting the peace.² The financial assistance actually delivered for Afghan reconstruction has consistently fallen far short of the amounts pledged.³

More serious, perhaps, than the continuing financial shortfalls is the deficit of human capital. Peacekeeping forces are still heavily concentrated in the area around Kabul, as are most international civilian personnel. Afghan administrative skills remain in very short supply and the infrastructure of government is embryonic at best. These shortcomings make evident the need for qualitative changes in the nature of foreign assistance. Although military and police assistance is required to curb local war lords, to combat the resurgent Taliban and to restore civic order, a substantial cadre of foreign civilians is also needed to support essential ministries and train Afghans to regain effective control of their own affairs.

The situation in Iraq in the wake of the overthrow of the regime of Saddam Hussein in 2003 is, in many ways, more complex than in Afghanistan and will be touched on here only in passing. Prior to the ill-advised American invasion, Iraq did enjoy a stable and reasonably efficient, even if dictatorial, regime. The government infrastructure was well developed and staffed mainly by a well-educated middle class. But the American policy of "de-Baathification," the lack of advance planning in respect to post-Saddam governance, and the occupation force's failure to establish security over most of the country created in Iraq, as in Afghanistan, a situation with an acute deficit of administrative capability. The exceedingly expensive attempt to fill the void, at least at the higher levels, with high-salaried, short-term contractual personnel, with minimal area expertise and virtually no knowledge of Arabic was, in the view of many observers, a colossal fiasco. One can easily see how longer-term assistance by a group of well trained, Arabic-speaking foreign administrative specialists – assuming their availability and a willingness to put them in the field – might have contributed to a much more stable situation than the one that exists at present. Additionally, pending the withdrawal of the occupying forces, it would probably have provided the interim regime with a greater degree of legitimacy and respect than that enjoyed by the current government.

Although some measure of reconstruction in failed states might, under the proper circumstances, be carried out by UN peacekeeping forces or, as in Iraq, by an occupying army, no matter how well trained its soldiers may be, some administrative functions are best reserved for civil servants. A problem exists, however, in respect to recruitment. Many capable civilians will be unwilling to serve in areas of political instability and endemic danger, while others who are willing might not be especially able. In view of this problem I propose the establishment of a United Nations Administrative Academy (UNAA). This academy would graduate a thousand or more highly trained individuals annually. Graduates would then enter a UN Administrative Reserve for a period of ten years during which time they would be on call for duty in failed or endangered states as, when, and where needed. I shall devote the balance of this presentation to a discussion of what the academy would entail, what its graduates might do, and the anticipated costs and benefits.

How Would the Academy Function?

The academy envisaged would initially provide instruction in English, Spanish and French and have three appropriately situated campuses in stable host countries such as

Canada, Costa Rica, and Switzerland. In Canada, for example, it might be based at the Lester B. Pearson Canadian International Peacekeeping Training Center in Cornwallis, Nova Scotia; in Costa Rica at the United Nations University for Peace in San José; and in Switzerland at the UN complex in Geneva. In time, a fourth campus offering instruction in Arabic might also become feasible.

Academy faculty and administrators would be drawn largely from the pool of persons who have had relevant experience in UN peacekeeping missions, supplemented, as needed, by others with specialized professional expertise. Support staff would be locally hired.

Students, both male and female, would be selected competitively on the basis of merit and would initially have to pass tough qualifying examinations given periodically in one of the three working languages of the academy. While an attempt would be made to attract qualified individuals from all parts of the world, special efforts would be directed at recruiting from developing countries. Additional eligibility requirements would include possession of a baccalaureate degree or equivalent experience, falling in the age range from 21 to 35, being in good health, and having a moral record free from serious blemish. The application and testing processes would be handled through the national offices of the UN Development Program. Where needed, travel support to reach testing places would be provided.

Instituting competitive examinations as the chief determinant of eligibility obviously entails costs not present in the present system of recruitment for civilian staff positions in UN peacekeeping missions, in which, arguably, class privilege, personal connections, and country of origin play too large a role.⁴ Top posts in such missions tend to be staffed disproportionately by personnel from relatively affluent countries or by elite social strata from a relatively small number of developing countries. Whether such individuals have been sufficiently sensitive to the cultures and economic situations of those whose needs they are intended to serve is often open to question. Although there is, of course, no guarantee that those with less privileged backgrounds will be better equipped to perform their jobs, it does seem likely that properly trained academy graduates will show the requisite empathy and understanding.

As in many military academies, students would be given a modest monthly stipend in addition to food and lodging. A portion of this stipend might be set aside in a personal escrow account redeemable only on successful completion of the stipulated ten years of reserve service following graduation. Where necessary, stipends would be supplemented by allowances for dependents. Books, supplies, and other related expenses would be borne by the academy. Paid leave and travel allowances would enable students to make periodic home visits.

The period of instruction would normally be three years, though for certain specialties a fourth year of study might be required. At the start of the third year of instruction there would be a four-to-six-month field internship, within an existing peacekeeping mission where possible, or in some other troubled area of the world where not. Internships with both governmental agencies and NGOs would be negotiated.

The subjects of instruction and the nature of curricula would evolve on the basis of experience. But the body of experience already accumulated by administrative training programs presently maintained by certain states such as India in respect to its own Indian Administrative Service would also be tapped in devising the UN program. A noteworthy

precedent for the present Indian program is the one established by the British East India Company at Haileybury College in England over the period 1806-57. Despite its obvious – and, in some respects, distasteful – colonial associations, there can be no denying that the Haileybury program produced many outstanding administrators and scholars. It provided a corps of dedicated and efficient Company servants who were able to communicate effectively with one another, had a deep understanding of what their jobs required of them, and shared a remarkably well-developed *esprit de corps*⁵

The UN Administrative Academy would, of course, have a core curriculum that all students would have to master. Included in such a core would be instruction on the history, structure, and functioning of the United Nations system and on how the military aspect of peacekeeping is conducted in that civilians and military staff will have to be able to work together effectively in the field. Other core activities would include study of general management techniques; workshops in effective written communication; honing critical skills in the reading of history and political propaganda; and training in cultural sensitivity, conflict resolution, and personnel management. Since staff would be expected eventually to train indigenous personnel to take over their functions, some instruction in pedagogy might also be required. Finally, physical training would be mandatory.

More specialized courses of instruction would include, *inter alia*, the following: police supervision, fiscal management, community development, basic education and educational reform, public health and sanitation, disaster relief, and so forth. Intensive multi-disciplinary study of at least one major world region would be compulsory and specialized language training, especially in such lingua francas as Arabic, Persian, Swahili, Hausa, Hindi/Urdu and Bahasa Indonesia/Malay would also be encouraged. Diverse means of testing mastery of subject matter would be utilized; and students who failed to maintain a high standard of achievement would be dismissed from the program.

Quite apart from the academic content of the program, the academy would seek to instill in its students a global ethos in which respect for universal human rights and loyalty to humanity as a whole would complement allegiance to one's own nation and would foster a sense of planetary stewardship. In this way, the academy would significantly promote world citizenship.

How Would Academy Graduates Be Utilized?

Upon completing their studies, all graduates would begin a ten-year contractual obligation as members of a UN Administrative Reserve and be subject to call to duty as, when, and where their services might be needed. In all likelihood, some would be assigned immediately to UN peacekeeping or peace-building missions with pressing civilian staff needs. The remainder would return to their home countries. Most of the latter group would presumably join or rejoin their respective administrative services or accept other jobs, perhaps with the local office of the UN Development Program, for which their training qualified them. They would work in such positions until their services were needed by the UN. It would be necessary for the UN to work out arrangements with the countries supplying the students whereby they would be released for UN duty when needed and also be guaranteed, on completion of their UN assignments, the right to return, with no loss of seniority, to the jobs they left in their home country. While the minimum reserve obligation would be for ten years, it would be possible for those wishing to do so to extend their reserve status beyond that period. But the UN would have final discretion in this matter.

In addition to being on standing call for active duty, reservists would be expected to be available for several weeks every three years or so following their graduation to participate in regional camps in which they would review successes and shortcomings of prior or ongoing UN peacekeeping missions, be made aware of other new knowledge and technological developments relevant for their mission. They would receive modest payment for these periods over and above the expenses entailed for their participation. Periodically, they would also be sent and be expected to study relevant literature from the UN Secretariat's Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

At the outset, most academy graduates on UN duty would serve in relatively junior positions under more experienced UN personnel appointed as chiefs of mission, deputy chiefs, or other senior posts. One would anticipate, however, that those who performed especially well would be marked for positions of increasing responsibility in subsequent assignments and possibly shift to permanent jobs within the UN system.

In its fifteen peacekeeping missions around the world as of January 2006 the UN fielded a total of 71,811 men and women, including 61,748 military personnel, 7,371 non-local civilian police and 2,692 observers.⁶ In the previous year such staff were recruited from more than a hundred countries and were assisted by approximately four thousand civilian personnel who performed a wide range of ancillary functions.⁷ Even within a single country, the staff was often exceedingly heterogeneous. For example, in 1992 the police personnel serving in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone came from no fewer than 43 countries from all parts of the world. Similarly diverse compositions of military and/or and civilian peacekeepers have characterized other major missions such as those in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, East Timor, and Cambodia.⁸ In that these forces would have trained and worked under widely differing conditions in their respective home countries, coordination among them on UN missions could not possibly be easy; and anecdotal evidence suggests that serious misunderstandings have occasionally occurred. Greater use of UNAA graduates would obviate this shortcoming. Moreover, such graduates could take over from military personnel the execution of many tasks which soldiers are typically not well equipped to carry out. This would not only ensure better performance, but would also lead to a somewhat less pervasive and potentially unpopular military presence in strife-torn areas.

The present relatively low ratio of civilian to military personnel in peacekeeping operations (less than 1:6) does not signify a lack of need for the former. Recruitment, as noted earlier, is a serious problem; and so is cost. Civilian personnel are far more costly per individual than soldiers and, given the tight budgetary constraints within which the UN must operate, their numbers are few fewer than needed. Afghanistan, for example, is a case where the UN has scarcely begun to meet the need. If a UN Administrative Academy already existed it could go far toward correcting that deficiency. The same might have been true in Iraq, if the requisite diplomatic groundwork and follow-on planning had been carried out. Since each UNAA graduate would have a contractual obligation to the UN, in effect a debt to repay for having received a free and high quality education, the salaries they would be paid while in the field could, quite legitimately, be set at lower levels than those of other UN civilian personnel. Additionally, their housing and other needs in the field might also be at more modest, yet perfectly adequate, levels.

The size of the UN Administrative Reserve would vary over time. The Reserve would not even come into existence until the graduation of the first cohort of students three years

after the inauguration of the academy. Thereafter, it would grow at the rate of a thousand or more persons per year, depending on the need for additional personnel and the ability of the academy to expand to meet that need. Much would also depend on the willingness of graduates to extend their reserve commitments beyond the required ten-year minimum. I would suggest that a reserve corps on the order of 15,000 could easily be maintained.

It is entirely possible that many academy graduates will never be called upon for active duty. Given the uncertain nature of politics, there is no way to predict meaningfully who might be needed where. But, even if an individual is never called to UN service, that does not mean that the money spent on his/her training will have been wasted. On the contrary, the development of human capital, which would be one of the missions of the academy, has relevance in a wide range of contexts. Service by well-trained personnel in the administration of their respective home countries could contribute substantially to their economic, social and political development. Many academy graduates, whether or not they have had foreign peacekeeping experience, are likely to rise quickly in the ranks of their home country's bureaucracy. This seems especially likely in the case of developing countries in which the pool of highly trained administrators is likely to be rather limited.

Costs and Benefits:

The costs of creating a UN Administrative Academy, like the costs of UN peacekeeping in general, would be remarkably modest in comparison to the benefits derived. Foremost among the many potential benefits from the deployment of UNAA graduates would be the establishment of political stability and the concomitant inhibition of the spread of domestic and international terrorist networks, as was the case with al-Qa'ida and the Taliban in Afghanistan. If even a single major act of terrorism were thereby to be averted, the benefits might well be incalculable.

In monetary terms, I would estimate that, after meeting start-up expenses, the UNAA could be maintained at a cost, in current dollars, of approximately \$200 million per year. This is roughly the current annual budget of the College of Liberal Arts at the University of Minnesota, where I taught for 34 years, and only a tenth or so of the budget of the University as a whole. My estimate assumes the existence of three campuses, a student body of about 3,300 (roughly 1,200 in the first year of study, and, because of attrition, 1,100 and 1,000 in the second and third years respectively), some 300 faculty members and administrative personnel, and approximately 300 workers providing technical, secretarial, and maintenance services. The estimate also figures in the costs of maintenance and overhead, home leaves, supplemental support for dependents, and testing of applicants. Given the enormous potential benefits, can anyone seriously argue that the international community (perhaps aided by private foundations, especially in the formative years) cannot afford the relatively trivial sum required for the academy proposed in this paper?

The costs of maintaining members of the UN Administrative Reserve in actual field operations would, of course, be entirely separate from those for the Academy. But, considering the much greater preparedness and efficiency anticipated for UNAA graduates in comparison to the more expensive ad hoc civilian staffing in UN operations to date, the establishment of the UNAA would very likely result in substantial overall savings in future operations. In any event, the cost of using the Reserve would be but a small fraction of the overall costs of peacekeeping, which have recently been running on the order of five to six billion dollars per year.

To put the whole matter of costs into a meaningful perspective, we may note that, for the fiscal year 2007, the United States government alone is proposing a budget of \$439.3 billion for the Department of Defense (not counting huge supplemental requests to pursue military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan) and another \$35.6 billion for the Department of Homeland Security.⁹ Justifying this extravagant unilateralist pursuit of the chimera of security while simultaneously denying the UN the means of maintaining an adequate peacekeeping capability makes very little sense.

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Notes:

¹ Data supplied by Center for Defense Information, Washington, DC, telephone call dated 6 June 2002.

² Ibid.

³ For example, of the \$4.5 billion of aid called for at the International Conference on Reconstruction Assistance to Afghanistan held in Tokyo in December 2001, the total sum pledged as of January 2002 was a mere \$2.4 billion to be allotted over periods of up to five years' duration. See Barnett R. Rubin, "A Blueprint for Afghanistan," *Current History*, April 2002, Vol. 101, No. 654, pp. 153-159,

⁴ An excellent critique of present hiring practices and recommendations for reform will be found in Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers, *Towards a More Effective United Nations*, New York and Uppsala, Sweden: Ford Foundation and Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 1992.

⁵ The best work on this subject is Frederick Charles Danvers et al, *Memorials of Old Haileybury College*, Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co. 1894.

⁶ <http://www.un.org/depts/dpko>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ www.un.org/peacekeeping/operations (as accessed in June 2002).

⁹ <http://www.gpoaccess.gov/usbudget/fy07>.