

Statement by John D. Negroponte, Former Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 2001-2004 before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, December 9, 2015

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, it is a pleasure to appear before you this morning to discuss United Nations Peacekeeping, a subject of importance to United States security.

When I was Ambassador to the United Nations, this subject was frequently on the agenda of the UN Security Council. During my tenure there peacekeeping operations were stood up in Sierra Leone and Liberia, among other countries and, of course, we also renewed a number of operations that continue to this day, such as in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the Western Sahara and so-forth.

I want to state categorically at the outset my conviction that United States support for UN peacekeeping operations is in the overwhelming national security interest of our country. There are three major reasons for which I hold this view. I call these three arguments: 1) Cost; 2) “Boots on the Ground”; and 3) Legitimacy. I will explain each of these three thoughts further. But before I do, let me mention what I consider to be the fundamental rationale for PKO’s in the first place. Situations arise around the world, either because of state-to-state conflict, civil strife or state failure that require outside forces to maintain peace and order. And these forces are frequently required in substantial numbers because numbers matter when it comes to keeping the peace. Send peacekeepers in adequate numbers to deal with a situation and their presence can have a rapid calming effect. Send them in insufficient numbers and their deterrent effect can be degraded, thereby inviting trouble from those opposed to the peace we are trying to uphold. More and more, UN peacekeepers have been called upon to maintain the peace in situations of civil strife, especially in Africa. And protecting endangered civilians has increasingly been included in their mandates. Though the record of UN PKO’s has been mixed, their efforts over the years have resulted in some important successes.

Let me return to the three factors I alluded to earlier: 1) First, cost: The UN has more than 100,000 troops deployed in PKO’s around the world today. The approximate cost of deploying these forces is \$8 billion per year. Our share of these costs is less than \$3 billion, a small fraction of what it would cost to deploy US forces on similar missions. This not a trivial argument. In today’s world and with the high cost of deploying US forces to overseas missions, clearly it is an important advantage for us to know that we have considerably less expensive options available to us regarding whose forces might be available to carry out an intervention we deem to be in our interest;

2) Second: The “Boots on the Ground” argument: This of course is an argument related to financial costs. Just as we benefit from the lower cost of UN peacekeeping budgets as compared to our own defense spending, we also do not deploy our own combat forces to these situations. This is a huge benefit. It is hard to imagine sustained public support for a hypothetical situation wherein US combat units were deployed to five or ten PKO’s abroad. The costs in US blood and treasure would be unacceptably high and the spotlight on the situations in which US forces were involved could undermine the kind of public support and patience required in some of these very difficult situations. So, support for UN PKO’s saves us from

having to contemplate these possibilities. It also enables us to think about choices other than US boots on the ground or nothing at all;

3) Third, Legitimacy: How many times have we undertaken or contemplated intervention without the legitimating imprimatur of a UN Security Council Resolution? In early 2003 I was in the well of the Security Council arguing for a Chapter VII UNSC resolution permitting the use of force against Iraq. We failed to achieve that resolution and soon thereafter intervened in Iraq with a coalition of the willing. I am not saying that a PKO would have been appropriate at that point in time in Iraq. But what I do want to highlight is that we subsequently paid a high domestic and international price for intervening in Iraq without the support and blessing of a UNSC resolution. By definition, a UN PKO has consensus support within the P-5 and the blessing of a Security Council Resolution. This is an important political and legal advantage which should not be dismissed lightly.

Senator Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, Members of the Committee: I know there are issues regarding the effectiveness, comportment and leadership of some PKO's; and these are issues that will require continued attention and effort from troop contributing and other UN members alike. And given our leadership role in the world and our status as the UN's largest single financial contributor, we have a special responsibility in this regard. But whatever imperfections or blemishes might exist in the UN Peacekeeping setup, it is our responsibility to help address these issues in a constructive way. With steady engagement from the US and others, I foresee continued improvement in the performance and utility of PKO's and even their more creative use in addressing some of the very difficult security challenges around the globe.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee on such an important topic. I would be pleased to try to answer any questions you might have.