1 Peacekeeping and Coercive Diplomacy: Russian Suasion

How is one to understand Russian ‘peacekeeping’ operations? Is the experience of traditional United Nations (UN) peacekeeping sufficient? If not, to what extent are theories developed on the use of force short of war relevant? In order to address these questions, this chapter is divided into three parts. First, it is important to examine the evolution of international peacekeeping during and after the Cold War, to understand how, and if, Russian ‘peacekeeping’ relates to broader international approaches. Second, this chapter will examine discussions of the use of force short of war, focusing on coercive diplomacy and naval suasion. On this basis, it will be possible to establish a framework for understanding Russian policy towards these conflicts.

THE EVOLUTION OF INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING

A firm understanding of traditional and contemporary forms of international peacekeeping will provide a basis with which to compare Russian operations. The evolution of international peacekeeping constitutes the wider context within which Russian ‘peacekeeping’ has occurred.

Traditional Peacekeeping

According to Marrack Goulding, ‘the thirteen operations, established during the Cold War, fostered the general evolution of a body of principles, procedures and principles for peacekeeping [and] came to represent a corpus of case law or customary practice which was by and large accepted by all concerned’.1 Traditional peacekeeping operations were guided by six principles, and the Russian government has been at pains to adopt some of these.

First, traditional operations were established by the UN legislative bodies, under the command and control of the Secretary General, with costs met collectively. Peacekeeping was to represent the collective will...
of the international community, not to be a unilateral instrument employed by self-interested states.

Second, these operations were set up with the consent and cooperation of the parties involved. Peacekeeping operations were deployed under so-called ‘Chapter VI +1/2’, between Chapter VI on ‘Pacific Settlement of Disputes’ and Chapter VII on ‘Actions in response to Threats to Peace, Breaches of Peace, and Acts of Aggression’.

Third, impartiality guided the actions of traditional peacekeeping forces. These forces were required never to take sides in a conflict, but to act as an ‘interim arrangement set up without prejudice to the claims and positions of the parties’.

A fourth guiding principle was that peacekeeping troops were provided voluntarily by member states. Generally, troops were provided by small and medium powers, in order to exclude superpower rivalry from an operation.

Fifth, peacekeepers were to limit the use of force to self-defence. Paul Diehl argued that peacekeeping troops were ‘not designed to alter the prevailing distribution of power in its area of deployment’. Peacekeeping troops had to display unique qualities: ‘deliberate avoidance of the use of force … the willingness to swallow pride and turn the other cheek to one’s adversary and an emphasis on de-escalation rather than retaliation’.

Finally, traditional peacekeeping troops were deployed only after a cease-fire between the parties to a conflict. William Durch argued that such operations function in a ‘niche market’, when ‘states and groups are sick of conflict and want to get on with their lives but don’t trust their erstwhile enemies in the cease fire [agreement].’ These troops were ‘inert guarantors whose success relied largely on the effective nature of the political agreements which had been reached prior to their deployment’.

The strength of traditional operations resided in the ‘hostage effect’ that they created. This effect consisted of ‘placing a soldier from an international force between two opposing armies as a hostage to their good behaviour’. The success of this effect depended on the operation’s impartiality and its minimum use of force. The operation had to be seen by all as the legitimate expression of the will of the international community. Traditional peacekeeping was a carefully calibrated instrument, balancing political and military requirements to avoid the appearance of partiality.

As will be seen, the Russian government has consciously adopted some of the principles of traditional peacekeeping. Still it must be