

Book Review

South Africa and United Nations Peacekeeping Offensive Operations: Conceptual models

Antonio Garcia

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This book review serves as reflection on Antonio Garcia's book, *South Africa and United Nations Peacekeeping Offensive Operations: Conceptual models*. The review was done from a view-point of fellow academic, senior officer and peacekeeper of the South African National Defence Force.

In his book, Garcia aims to address current and future conceptual questions about conflict and force employment of the SANDF and the United Nations (UN) Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) where peacekeeping takes an offensive role. Garcia further aims to provide a conceptual model for the SANDF's future deployments, force generation and employment in UN peacekeeping missions from an offensive perspective through the lens of the SANDF. This book explores the link between the SANDF and the UN military conceptual models for future operations with the intention of achieving greater efficiency in the conduct of operations. The topic itself is regarded as paramount in contemporary security studies as it provides a valuable foundation of understanding to scholars who endeavour to study contemporary security studies. Therefore, Garcia adds critical knowledge to the academic world as well as the officer corps of the SANDF involved in planning and preparation of forces destined for external deployment. In the introduction, Garcia makes the reader aware of to the division between civilian and military counterparts and the importance of understanding the different roles of each in order to promote greater efficiency during operations. He sets the stage by familiarising the reader with the concept of the use of force as conflict prevention within a complex modern security environment. He further makes mention of the African Renaissance as vision for African countries to pursue the responsibility to protect civilians and then leads the reader to the concept of the Force Intervention Brigade (FIB). The SANDF's face change is made known, and an abridged version of the SANDF's participation in peacekeeping is provided.

At the onset of the book Garcia, answers the “How do we fight?” question by providing a conceptual model for the South African (SA) Army future deployment by focusing on the SA Army Future Deployment Strategy Concept System (SAAFDSCS). He uses the first chapter to explain two experimental model concepts of the SA Army, namely the SA Army Capstone Concept (SAACC) and the SA Army Future Operating Concept (SAAFOC). By doing so, he provides a concise description of the “ways” and “means” of “[h]ow do we fight?”. In this, he makes it clear that the MONUSCO (where the FIB is involved in offensive operations) should inform future force development and employment strategies of the SANDF. This part of the book provides a strong academic foundation to the work. He then shifts the focus to offensive operations and the importance of theory and doctrine. He states that the UN has not yet defined offensive operations and a need to describe it is paramount (p. 25). The fact that Garcia is bold enough to propose the latter serves as indication of his well-researched knowledge and expertise in the field of the contemporary African security nexus.

In the second chapter, Garcia makes several further proposals to the UN strategic and operational framework firstly, in terms of amending doctrine regarding offensive operations on all levels of peacekeeping, and secondly, to include the manoeuvre theory. He highlights that offensive operations are difficult on a tactical level and that a potential precedent may be set on a political level. Therefore, the complexity of the use of force is exacerbated. Thus, there is a need for a well-defined doctrine that should be binding to all troop contributing countries (TCCs) which is aligned to a particular theory of war and clearly defined limits and definitions of the use of force. Again, Garcia acknowledges the importance of re-aligning current doctrine to an ever-changing security environment. In doing so, he provides critical knowledge to the audience not only to “know what you have learned”, but instead also to take action in keeping abreast with changing times.

The third chapter focuses on the manoeuvre theory of war as a proposed theory. The premise of Garcia’s argument is that certain elements of war fighting and peacekeeping are synonymous more specifically, robust peacekeeping, peace enforcement and offensive operations, and that the manoeuvre theory is best suitable to the latter (p. 40). Garcia emphasises the absence of doctrine addressing the theory of war in UN offensive operations, and he makes it clear that the tactics and techniques applied in offensive operations are determined by the TCCs themselves. He identifies three methods of achieving victory through manoeuvre warfare, namely pre-emption, disruption and dislocation (p. 42). He links the latter with the different levels of war and draws the reader’s attention to the need to align doctrine on all levels in order to focus all offensive operations towards the centre of gravity of the opposing force, followed by the required operations applying doctrine and military theory. He identifies a gap in the command and control link between the UN and the TCCs and proposes a logic concept of operation (CONOPS) towards more efficient operations. In military terms, from a SANDF point of view, this logic is critical to officers in the operational area, and the value of understanding the CONOPS is unmatched in terms of the optimal allocation of resources while simultaneously addressing objectives and keeping risk in mind.

In the fourth chapter, Garcia bring to the readers' attention the importance to amend the cornerstone of UN future offensive operations and the operational concept in order to stay abreast with the asymmetric type of warfare that prevails in a complex African battle space. He emphasises the importance of addressing both the paradigm shift towards an understanding of future threats and challenges and the philosophical approach of the organisation in dealing with current and future operations. His pre-emptive mind-set is admirable and is in line with the pre-emptive principle of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). He concludes the chapter by proposing a strategic command centre to serve as link between the success of mission and the balance of resources, context, leadership and operational realities (p. 58). He also shows a well-developed sense of tactical thinking by proposing the development of an operational command centre linked to the G3 component of the UN, comprising of staff belonging to the TCCs. By doing so, he predicts a more efficient approach to future operations, again displaying a pre-active instead of a reactive mind-set.

In the fifth chapter, Garcia deliberately challenges the traditional thinking of war by focusing on the manoeuvre theory and concepts captured in the Staff Officers Operational Manual (SOOM). His audience is captured by rethinking concepts such as levels of war, theories of war, maxims, centre of gravity, and surprise. He draws parallels and asks academic questions and makes valid proposals for future studies. This chapter resembles an inspiration to academics and officers to rethink historical warfare and reflecting on its applicability on contemporary and future offensive operations during peacekeeping. Actual further studies along these proposed lines would certainly be worth-while pursuing.

The sixth chapter gives an abridged, but concise impression of realities during offensive operations during peacekeeping. Throughout his career, Garcia deployed as combat engineer commander in several internal deployments on the South African, Botswana and Zimbabwean borders. Furthermore, he served as MONUSCO brigade military staff officer and as combat engineer troop commander during the United Nations African Union Hybrid Mission in Darfur (UNAMID), Sudan. It is clear that this exposure to external deployments shaped his thinking in peacekeeping operations from both a sharp-end perspective as well as a blunt-end perspective. Garcia's perspective on specifically explosive ordnance and clearance of mines in war-torn countries, such as the DRC, is in line with the SANDF policy on Joint Warfare Procedures. However, he acknowledges and even challenges the potential importance of acting more decisively in this particular aspect of PSOs and makes valid policy suggestions in this regard. This part of his writing is important for military decision-makers and, if implemented, might add value to academia in future studies and mission outcomes for PSOs in Africa and elsewhere in the world. He elaborates on the importance of including aspects neglected in current doctrine, such as unexploded ordnance (UXOs), explosive remnants of war (ERWs) and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Further aspects referred to are the realities faced by deployed peacekeepers, a proposed FIB air cavalry and the concept of "the strategic Corporal" (p. 87). It is clear that his experience in the mission area inspired these ideas. As former peacekeeper and FIB company commander, I can safely attest that his proposals are well founded and should be pursued.

In his book, Garcia does not provide graphic content other than one figure that illustrate the levels of peacekeeping, and one table illustrating the SAACC. Keeping the topic in perspective, it would have been informative, especially to the military audience, if other content, such as maps and pictures, had been included especially to illustrate factors, such as terrain, time and space and specific localities to which he refers in many cases. Furthermore, considering his background as combat engineer, the SANDF's engineer capabilities, and the North Kivu province in Eastern DRC being the Great Lakes region, it was expected that Garcia would have dedicated some part of the book to the potential strategic importance of hydrography during future offensive operations.

Overall, Garcia produced an academic contribution that challenges historical thinking about warfare and inspires a new perspective around the thinking of contemporary and future offensive operations during peacekeeping on the African battle space. His work supports several proposals where regional and international organisations should also pay attention in order to stay abreast of the ever-changing security environment of the twenty-first century.

ENDNOTES

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