

Austria's Participation in Peacekeeping and Peace Support Missions

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Increased Focus on Peacekeeping and Peace Support Missions

Peacekeeping and peace support have always been a special challenge for armed forces. Fortunately, with the disappearance of the classical threat emerging from the cold war this sort of military activity could become the main effort for armed forces – especially in Europe. For this reason,

Austria took the opportunity to orient its troops also towards the perseverance and stabilization of peace in conflict areas all over the world- a commitment it had already shown since 1960. This new orientation is clearly being shown by the installation of a separate “Austrian International Operations Command”, which exclusively deals with peacekeeping matters.

Currently Austria has Deployed more than 1.200 Troops

Currently, Austria has deployed more than 1,200 troops and individual soldiers abroad in a total of 14 missions, reaching from the Balkans over the Western Sahara and the Near East as far as to Ethiopia and Eritrea.

Austria's largest contingent currently deployed abroad is the KFOR Contingent in the Kosovo with more than 500 troops – a commitment we share in our area of responsibility together with comrades from Germany and Switzerland.

In addition to that, successful Austrian peacekeeping cooperation with soldiers from other countries has also been shown for years on the Golan Heights together with Slovakia or in Bosnia and Herzegovina (EUFOR) with troops from Italy and Slovenia. All in all, since 1960 about 60,000 Austrian soldiers have served in more than 70 missions worldwide.²¹

Progress Report

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In order to maintain and to improve the quality of our peacekeeping troops, the “Austrian Peacekeeping Cycle” has to undergo a permanent evaluation process. In detail this means that at the end of the pre-deployment training a so-called “progress report” is established which serves as a reference document for the training standards to be reached by the next contingent. After six weeks of deployment, the contingent is again tested in the mission area itself with special regard to its operational, logistical and communications capability. The result of this test also serves as a guideline for the pre-deployment training of the next contingent. Finally, after 6 months (which is normally the end of tour), another “progress report” is compiled, consisting of the impressions and experiences made by the outgoing troops as well as my personal perceptions during the inspection tours in the mission area. These final findings are also taken into account for future peace support activities.

A Clear View on Topics

All these above-mentioned lessons learned give us a clear view on the topics we have to take into consideration for future peace support operations: Multinationality, interoperability, personnel management, information and intelligence, rapid deployment of forces and operational matters.

The constantly increasing number of countries willing to take part in peace support operations requires increased international cooperation skills. A main challenge in this context is the ability to speak foreign languages,

especially English. We therefore have to train our soldiers, particularly those in key leader functions, to speak at least the English language more or less fluently, as this can have a decisive impact on the interoperability and the successful accomplishment of a mission.

Logistics

Logistics has always been a big challenge when deploying soldiers to foreign countries. The logistic burden for a single country can be very heavy, often too heavy. I would therefore suggest a closer international cooperation in this field in order to share the logistical burden and to make it easier for the peacekeeping countries to fulfil their logistical needs, e.g. by the installation of so-called “multinational logistic units”. I am sure that this will boost the motivation especially of smaller countries to show active commitment in peacekeeping operations.

Active Duty Personnel and the Importance of Reservists

As far as the personnel situation is concerned, Austria has to deal with the principle of voluntariness, which means that soldiers can only be deployed abroad if they want to. Fortunately, we have currently some 16,000 soldiers who are willing to be deployed abroad. Nevertheless, it is sometimes very difficult to find the right person for the right job. However, Austria is rather lucky in this matter as the Austrian Armed Forces consist

of both active duty soldiers and reservists, which gives us a bigger selection to find the right person. To be honest, it is not only manning that counts but also the know-how reservists bring from their “civilian life”. “Civilian know-how meets and enriches military skills” – this is the, until now, successful motto of our personnel management for missions abroad. And we strongly hope that it will go on like this in the future. So, the Austrian Army needs reservists in order to be able to contribute to peace on earth. Nevertheless, the principle of voluntariness could sometime turn out as a limitation in the fulfillment of peacekeeping tasks.

Another limitation could be seen in the fact that Austrian soldiers have not been confronted very much with typical peace support techniques so far, e.g. negotiation, patrolling, house searching, crowd and riot control etc. As a consequence, these skills have to be trained during the pre-deployment phase, making it longer.

The same it is with the equipment. There is nowadays less need for heavy armament like tanks or classical artillery. We now need more mobility in form of lighter, hard-skinned or protective vehicles like wheeled APCs etc. And we of course need non lethal weapons in order to be able to suppress or deescalate riots (like last year in the Kosovo) without heavily wounding or even killing people.

Information gathering and the production of useful intelligence are crucial for the successful accomplishment of a mission as well as for the force protection. Austria does not have highly-sophisticated

intelligence assets like satellites etc. But what we can do is to employ traditional assets on the ground, like for example human intelligence teams. This has an effect on both operational and force protection matters. Therefore, it is a standing procedure for us that wherever we send a larger contingent we also deploy a so-called “national intelligence cell” (NIC). This NIC is usually part of the big “NIC family” in the AOR and cooperates with intelligence installations from other countries.

Rapid Reaction Forces

If the worst comes to the worst, it can be necessary to deploy forces immediately. At the moment in Austria brigades are providing the framework structure for the deployment of battalion size task forces. Nevertheless, in our opinion, it takes much time to form a battalion out of a brigade and to train it for a mission abroad. We therefore started last year to build “forces for international operations” consisting of standing and non-standing units.

- **The standing units consist of active duty soldiers and part-time soldiers deployable within 5 days, if necessary.**
- **Non-standing units need 30 to 60 days to be ready for deployment.**

We already deployed such units as reinforcement to the Kosovo contingent in March this year and we will do so again for the currently deployed contingent. By the end of this year we expect to have 1,000 troops for

international operations available, scheduled for the whole PSO spectrum.

Talking about operational matters I clearly want to stress that, even though peacekeeping operations are multinational, they require the principle of unity of command to be fulfilled. So, when for example a nation sends reinforcements to a mission area it is absolutely necessary that the commander of the multinational forces can freely dispose of them. I therefore want to underline that as little national caveats as possible should be imposed on a peace support operation in order to ease the freedom of action for the multinational force commander. The same it is with the acceptance of the rules of engagement established for a certain mission.

Conclusion

As you can see, in Austria **peacekeeping and peace support operations have become a core task for the armed forces, and it is situated at the same level as the need for home defense.** In the future - and this is being clearly reflected in the current reform of the Austrian Armed Forces - our troops will even be more oriented towards international operations. So, in Austria we are all confident that by 2010 the preconditions for the deployment of a multinational framework brigade under Austrian command will be achieved, i.e. a headquarters battalion and at least two maneuver battalions. This requires of course thorough training and preparation in order to meet the needs for multinational cooperation. Austria will do its best to succeed!