

Resolving Internal Conflicts in the Post-Cold War Era: Is Peacekeeping Enough?

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Abstract. This article aims to develop a comprehensive approach to the resolution of internal conflicts that have dominated the post Cold-War era as a new threat to regional and global peace. The study first discusses the efficacy of UN peacekeeping in such conflicts as the most visible intervention by the international community. It is stressed that UN peacekeeping is a necessary element for intra-state conflict resolution process, especially to stop physical violence, but for actual success, it should be complemented by multi-level peace making efforts, including decentralization, democratization, distributive justice, confidence building and international cooperation, all of which are discussed in detail.

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1. Introduction

The end of the Cold War and fundamental changes taking places in international relations have changed the character of international conflict. Since the late 1980s, the main threat to regional and global peace has not come from major inter-state confrontations, but from another source: internal conflicts, conflicts occurring within the borders of states. These conflicts have replaced the Cold War's ideological clashes as the principal sources of current conflicts. To be sure, from May 1988, when the Cold War was coming to its end, to the present day, there have been 47 conflicts the United Nations (UN) intervened and only 3 of them were inter-state in character (Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, Chad-Libya border dispute in 1994 and Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute in 1998-2000). If we add the latest Iraqi invasion by the United States to the number 3, the total number of inter-state

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conflicts during the whole post-Cold War period is only 4, whereas 44 overt internal conflicts have occurred in the same period.¹

Internal conflicts frequently involve ethnic, religious, cultural, tribal rivalries, as well as domestic power struggles for governance. But most of them are ethnically and culturally based. Such conflicts tend to occur when two or more ethno-cultural groups within a state feel different from each other and more important, they view their relationship as unfair under the existing political order. Then, distinct groups seek favorable structural changes through conflict, ranging from recognition of cultural rights to autonomy or political separation, even full independence, at times.

Until a few years ago, the conventional wisdom in the West was that ethnicity and nationalism were outdated concepts and largely resolved problems. On both sides of the Cold War, the trend seemed to indicate that the world was moving toward internationalism rather than nationalism. As a result of the threat of nuclear warfare, great emphasis on democracy and human rights, economic interdependence and gradual acceptance of universal ideologies, it became fashionable to speak of the demise of nationalism and the nation-state. Despite contrary expectations, however, a fresh cycle of ethno-national movements have re-emerged recently in Eastern Europe (including the Balkans), Central Asia and Africa. Although the decline and subsequent demise of the Soviet Empire, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the collapse of communism and the gradual decline of ideology, in general, have played a significant role in this development, it is necessary to recognize the fact that internal conflicts are not merely the result of the re-emergence of historic enmities that are suppressed by imperial centers. In fact, these are the conflicts that reflect fundamental clashes between peoples of different ethnic groups, different cultures, even different civilizations. Distorted images, excessive fears and distrust, fundamental divergences on political, economic and religious values, all of which are products of centuries, are all in play (Horowitz, 2001; Lee, 2004; Wolff, 2006). Most of the time, the absence of a clear battlefield and involvement of multiple parties with uneven force make the situation even more problematic (Saha, 2006). Therefore, internal conflicts can be said to be rather difficult to manage and resolve.

¹ Source: UN statistics, January 2006, obtained from the official UN web site, www.un.org. Detailed information about the internal conflicts the UN intervened can also be received from the same web site.

But no matter how problematic they are, these conflicts somehow need to be resolved; otherwise, in today's highly interdependent world, global peace will not be stable. The purpose of this article is to discuss possible responses to internal conflicts that can be helpful in their resolution process. This will be done by first evaluating the efficacy of UN peacekeeping operations in these conflicts and then addressing several resolution strategies complementing them. The aim is to achieve a comprehensive approach of peace making that may be applicable to the intra-state strifes of the post-Cold War era.

2. PEACEKEEPING AND PEACE MAKING IN INTERNAL CONFLICTS

When internal conflicts occur, at first, it would be natural to assume that the parties should settle their own conflict, since this is their concern, their business. But most of the time, because of uncontrolled escalation, as well as the psychological components of conflict (e.g., the tension of hostility, lack of trust, mutual suspicion, impulse to secrecy, biased communication, and so on), conflicting parties are the least equipped to stop fighting and design a solution by themselves. Thus, third-party intervention often becomes a necessity in the process of peacemaking. In most internal conflicts, however, the state cannot function as a neutral third-party, for it usually favors ethnically or economically dominant group(s) over others. Thus, its unilateral intervention just exacerbates violence. For this reason, neutral third-party function is often expected from the international community.

The most visible form of international community intervention to violent internal conflicts is the installation of peacekeeping forces. This duty is particularly performed by the UN due to its grand mission of being the grand guardian of international peace and security. UN peacekeeping, in its generic sense, is an activity which involves the interposition of military and police forces between conflicting groups, either to stop violence or to prevent it. The groups to be kept apart would be state agents, paramilitaries, militia, guerrilla groups, or even mobs. What they all share is a desire to use violence against the other side as a way of conducting their conflict.

Since mid-1988, there has been a great expansion in the number of UN peacekeeping forces. While from 1948 to 1978, only 13 peacekeeping forces were set up and in the following ten-year period, no new forces were established, from May 1988 to October 1993, a further 20 forces were

created. As of February 2007, the number of UN peacekeeping operations has reached 61, 18 of which are still operating in the field, involving 80094 military personnel and civilian police.²

The ending of the Cold War has created a new optimistic view about international relations, whereby it has become fashionable to speak that force, in the form of military power, has run its course in international politics. By extension, many (e.g., Fleitz, 2002) also attempted to dismiss peacekeeping as a peace strategy. Such a view tends to see peacekeeping as an endeavor to contain violence, rather than ending it.

However, in coping with frequently violent internal conflicts, peacekeeping often emerges as a necessary element of conflict management and has a role to play in the overall peace making process. Especially when adversaries are engaged in mutual violence or armed clashes, peacekeeping appears to be the most urgent strategy. Until violence is stopped, or at least managed, it is unlikely that any attempts to resolve competing interests, to change negative attitudes or to alter socio-economic circumstances giving rise to conflict will be successful. By far, thousands of civilian and military peacekeepers who have toiled over the past five decades have been successful, in general, in keeping people alive and in preventing conflict escalation.

By the same token, in the absence of peacekeeping forces, any group wishing to sabotage a peace initiative may find it easier to provoke armed clashes with the other side, since there is no impartial buffer between the sides which can act as a restraining influence. The absence of a suitable control mechanism may enable even a small group of people committed to violence to wreak enormous havoc, whereas the presence of an impartial third force can be an important factor for stability. Historically, UN peacekeeping has been, and still is, in most parts of the world, acceptable as a third-party in a way that a purely national or even regional military presence would not be. This is mainly because of the fact that the UN, as the supposed guardian of international peace and security, has no particular stake in an outcome apart from a satisfactory reduction in violence.

Finally, peacekeeping forces can also contribute to peace making process by:

² Source: <http://www.un.org.peace/bnote010101.pdf>

- Monitoring or even running local elections, as in Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, the Congo and East Timor (now independent Timor-Leste).
- Guarding the weapons surrendered by or taken from the parties in conflict.
- Ensuring the smooth delivery of humanitarian relief supplies during an ongoing conflict, as in Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia and Sudan.
- Assisting in the reconstruction of state functions, as in Bosnia-Herzegovina, El Salvador, the Congo, East Timor and Liberia.
- Providing inter-communal gatherings with secure meeting places and safe escorts to and from negotiations, as on Cyprus, for instance, where the Ledra Palace Hotel, located in the UN zone in Nicosia, has been used for inter-communal meetings (Berdal, 2003; Serafino, 2005).

None of these points are, of course, not to argue that UN peacekeeping is a perfect, or the only strategy for dealing effectively with internal conflicts. In fact, intensive and heavy peacekeeping tactics may escalate violence and reduce the channels of successful conflict resolution, as exemplified by UNOSOM I fiasco in Somalia in 1992-1993. But the point here is that a well-managed peacekeeping can also be an essential part of the resolution process.

In addition, it should be kept in mind that UN peacekeeping is a “palliative”, not a cure. Peacekeeping forces do not directly resolve conflicts. That is not their purpose. All they can do is to manage the conflict for a period of time to allow the people who can resolve it to negotiate a resolution of their differences in an atmosphere not poisoned by death and destruction. This was astutely observed by Brian Urquhart, who compared peacekeeping to a nursing care. He wrote:

Peacekeeping is a sort of daily nursing cure. It is like the staff in a hospital engaged in getting the patient’s temperature down and keeping him reasonably healthy. And when you get to a certain point, a surgeon may be able to arrive and deal with the problem (Urquhart, 2003: 13).

There is, of course, no guarantee that such an opportunity will be used constructively. If it is not, one should not blame peacekeepers

immediately. Indeed, UN peacekeeping forces do save lives and provide a minimum degree of order. And no better alternative has yet been found by the inter-state system for the work they perform. However, since peacekeeping cannot reverse destructive processes giving rise to conflict on its own, it should be complemented by proper peace making efforts. Especially studies of ethnic, nationalist movements have shown that it is nearly impossible to eliminate or repress such movements through military power once ethnic mobilization has begun to manifest itself within a group (Gurr, 2000; Giannakos, 2002; Ganguly and Macduff, 2003). If real progress is to be made toward resolution, the international community, in general, and the UN, as well as the parties themselves, in particular, ought to address at least the following areas:

A. DE-CENTRALIZATION

It is vital that the state not be made the instrument of a dominant ethno-cultural group, or groups, but promote tolerance and diversity. This system should be fostered by a highly-sophisticated civil society sensitive to ethnic, cultural differences. The aim should not be to replace a system of individual human rights with a system of group rights, but to find a way of combining both that does not do severe damage to either. Successful multi-ethnic states are those respecting the right of open cultural expression. This often involves a degree of political autonomy for schools and religious institutions, the recognition of minority languages and the use of these languages in the media, in official transactions and in courts.

Richard A. Schermerhorn convincingly explains in his classical study, *Comparative Ethnic Relations*, that in the absence of political autonomy, interactions of different ethno-cultural groups within a state lead inevitably to domination-subordination relations, thus inequality of political power. The unequal sharing of costs and benefits, for Schermerhorn, is usually the source of ethnic tension and following secessionist movements (Schermerhorn, 1978). John W. Burton similarly claims that successful conflict resolution in internal conflicts may depend on the establishment of a “zonal functional system” where there are geographically separated groups linked in matters of common concern by functional agencies. To Burton, the geographic separation is important, for it provides a sense of security, allows for the creation of political institutions on a regional basis that will be more sensitive to cultural differences and gives different groups the space to express their own distinctiveness (Burton, 1994). Arend Lijphart also

promotes this approach with his idea of “segmented autonomy”. He points out that autonomy could take both a territorial and a non-territorial form, since not all ethno-cultural groups are concentrated in a specific region. The non-territorial form would be an autonomous organization, such as communal council or chamber, which could unite a dispersed community to decide policy in areas such as education, religion or cultural affairs (Lijphart, 1999: 41-47).

Indeed, de-centralization was a key feature of the 1992 settlement that has brought relative peace to Mozambique. It has been a major success in Spain where it contributed to political stability in the post-Franco transition, especially in Catalonia and the Basque country. It can also be recalled that successful multi-ethnic states, such as Switzerland, Canada and Belgium, are those that have a considerable degree of political de-centralization in which there exists a combination of “self-rule” and “shared rule”.

B. DEMOCRATIZATION

Sometimes it is argued that democracy and peaceful co-existence of different groups in ethnically heterogeneous states are only exceptionally possible, for democracy creates favorable conditions through which distinct groups naturally seek separation. Michael Walzer, for instance, contends that “it must be said that politics follows nationality, wherever politics is free. Pluralism in the strong sense -one state, many peoples- is possible only under tyrannical regimes” (Walzer, 1992: 6).

Francis Fukuyama also questions whether it is feasible to have democratic and, at the same time, stable multi-ethnic states. He wrote:

Democracy is not particularly good at resolving disputes between different ethnic or national groups. The question of national sovereignty is inherently uncompromisable... The Soviet Union could not become democratic and at the same time remain unitary (Fukuyama, 1998: 119).

However, as a challenge to such democracy pessimists, Arend Lijphart’s influential work on consociationalism, *Democracy in Plural Societies*, sets out the conditions under which stable and democratic multi-

ethnic states are possible. This work proposes a democratic system of government that differs from the traditional Westminster majoritarian model. In its pure form, the Westminster model is characterized by one-party cabinets, a two-party system, a first past the post electoral system, a unitary and centralized government and an unwritten constitution. Consociational democracies, on the other hand, involve multi-party cabinets, a multi-party system, proportional representation, political decentralization and written constitutions which recognize certain rights of minority groups (Lijphart, 1977, 1999).

There are, according to Lijphart, four main characteristics of consociationalism, one of primary importance and three of secondary importance. The primary characteristic is the grand coalition of political leaders that represent all the significant communities. This elite cooperation is, for Lijphart, the central feature of consociational democracy. The secondary characteristics are the existence of a veto power for all communities on legislation that affects their vital interests; a system of proportionality in parliament, the civil service, and other government agencies; and a high degree of segmental autonomy so that each community has a considerable degree of freedom to run its own internal affairs (Lijphart, 1977, 1999).

Such a democracy model outlined by Lijphart can be quite helpful for conflict prevention and resolution in multi-ethnic societies. It may allow all distinct groups to express themselves freely, while, at the same time, let them enjoy the benefits of unity. Although there is an ongoing debate about the meaning of democracy, “democracy necessarily means granting some degree of political power to those who are ethnically different” (Muravchik, 1996: 584). The existence of a balance of power between various groups would prevent any group from becoming dominant and forming a majority rule on its own.

In fact, liberal democracies which are closer to Lijphart’s consociational model have been key factors for most successful multi-ethnic states, including Switzerland, Canada and Belgium. We should also recall that the absence of such democracies in authoritarian states, as in the former Soviet Union, the former Yugoslavia and the former Czechoslovakia, gave rise, in addition to other reasons, to the build of serious latent conflicts, leading eventually to political disintegration. Thus, promoting pluralistic democracies would be a significant step to take on the way to resolving internal conflicts of the post-Cold War era.

C. A STABLE INTER-STATE ENVIRONMENT

Another issue that internal conflict resolution efforts have to address is inter-state dimension. This dimension is important due to two reasons. First, an unstable inter-state environment that can be characterized by severe competition among states, particularly among major powers, is likely to be conflict encouraging, since states tend to exploit internal conflicts for their own ends, mostly by using them as a policy tool to weaken their rivals. It is not surprising, therefore, that many internal conflicts break out as internal manifestations of external power struggles.

Second, being in need of military and political support from others, ethnic groups, too, usually seek external allies and often turn for support to neighboring countries with whom there are ethnic, cultural bonds. States facing such a danger respond by creating alliances with those who are enemies of their neighbor and its allies. So, in time, states may find themselves embroiled in large balance-of-power conflicts (Lobell, 2004). Hence, peaceful resolution of internal conflicts may very well be contingent on the reduction of international tension.

In addition, a stable international environment is also essential for the UN and regional organizations to work effectively, or else these organizations, far from promoting peace and security, can easily become arenas of major state confrontations. For instance, it is a well-known fact that during the Cold War era, the UN was hobbled by the excessive use of veto power due to the superpower conflict. Only the thaw of the Cold War has created a constructive political atmosphere and only after that has an effective UN intervention become possible. As a matter of fact, while there were only 13 peacekeeping operations during the whole Cold War period, from 1948 to 1988, a further 20 were created from 1988 to 1993. At present, as of February 2007, the number has reached 61.³

So from every angle, a stable international environment is vital to internal conflict prevention and resolution. The general international environment today is not as threatening as it was during the Cold War. The general relaxation in superpower politics has undoubtedly contributed to the peace process in the former Yugoslavia, Angola, the Congo, Ethiopia, Liberia, and East Timor, to give a few recent example.

³ Source: <http://www.un.org>

D. DISTRIBUTIVE JUSTICE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

A fourth focus for internal conflict resolution would be the action to address economic inequalities between or among groups that seem to be a contributory factor in many violent internal strifes. Although ethno-cultural identity is valued in and of itself (Gurr, 1996, 2000), the economic dimension is still important, for a multi-ethnic state characterized by uneven distribution of wealth is a state where ethnic antagonisms are likely to grow. Economic well-being, on the other hand, may contribute to a sense of security and give ethnic minorities a stake in the system. Donald L. Horowitz calls this the “distributive approach” to ethnic conflict resolution, as opposed to structural approaches based on creating a political framework. He points out that such an approach may include preferential policies aimed at raising certain groups to a position of equality through investment, employment practices, access to education and land distribution (Horowitz, 1985: 653-681, 2001).

In fact, successful ethnically-heterogeneous states, such as the United States, Canada and Switzerland, are those that offer prosperity to their citizens. On the other hand, it is almost a rule that countries suffering internal clashes in the post-Cold War period, such as Somalia, Burundi, Liberia, Haiti, Sudan and Sierra Leone, are those where the ordinary suffer poverty, as well as evidently unjust distribution of wealth. The frustration of basic human needs and struggle against the privileged for better conditions often lead to serious social conflicts (Burton, 1997). Thus, conflict resolution efforts must be supported by economic programs aimed at increasing living standards and reaching distributive justice as much as possible. Discussing the details of such programs is beyond the aim of this article, but it can be certainly argued that no durable peace can be attainable in the absence of economic well-being and distributive justice.

E. CONFIDENCE BUILDING MEASURES

A final area that also needs particular attention in the process of resolving internal conflicts is to build trust between competing groups. In almost all violent internal conflicts, because of prolonged mutual hurts, parties develop intense distrust towards each other, perpetuating that in the form of group stereotypes as well. They see and acknowledge negative aspects of each other that fit or support the stereotype and ignore other aspects that do not fit. This tendency, in turn, inhibits communication and joint search for a

peaceful solution. It separates the parties like an invisible wall at the cognitive level. Therefore, building confidence between the parties in conflict often emerges as an important pre-requisite of constructive inter-communal dialogues (Yılmaz, 2005).

It should be acknowledged that confidence building is not an easy task for peace makers, since past hurts penetrate group identities to such an extent that removing hostile feelings requires much time and multi-level efforts. But there are several strategies that may be utilized to that end. For example, one way to overcome relational issues at the group level would be the so-called “track-two diplomacy”. Joseph V. Montville, one of the pioneers of this approach, defines the term as an unofficial, informal interaction between members of adversary groups or nations aiming to develop strategies, influence public opinion, and organize human and material resources in ways that might help resolve their conflict (Montville, 1990: 162). Empirical evidence shows that if well-organized and undertaken for a reasonably long time, people-to-people meetings and discussions, oftentimes working through problem-solving workshops mediated or facilitated by psychologically-sensitive third-parties, provide an opportunity for disputants to examine the root causes of their conflict, to explore possible solutions out of public view and to identify obstacles to better relationships. What is more, by allowing face-to-face communication, they help participants arrest dehumanization process, overcome psychological barriers and focus on relation building (Azar, 1990; Kelman, 1996). Best of all, any success in informal meetings would spill over into formal ones because those who change their negative images about the other side would push the formal negotiation process with a new perspective or they may become formal negotiators in later life (Davies and Kaufman, 2002; Bavly, 2005).

Track-two diplomacy is an area where UN specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) would play a major role as third-parties. They would arrange and facilitate problem-solving workshops between adversary groups, working as intermediaries in the process as well. Although not necessary, third-party help is usually needed in organizing track-two diplomacy, since the parties in conflict cannot easily take unilateral actions due to the concern for appearing weak, as well as intense hostile feelings towards the other side.

The possibilities for easing antagonism between rival groups would also be enhanced when the groups are brought together to work toward some

common ends. The creation of supranational bodies that have the responsibility for fulfilling key economic and social needs would gradually bring about a transfer of loyalty from the narrow cultural group to the supranational bodies. Eventually, particularistic antagonisms would be dissolved as the participants become caught up in a web of mutual dependence.

A scientific support to this idea comes from a series of experiments conducted by Muzaffer Sherif, a social psychologist, in an American school camp. In his experiment, Sherif divided a group of boys into two groups and conflict between them was then encouraged. He observed that as inter-group hostility increased, so did intra-group solidarity. The mutual hostility was overcome when the two groups were brought together to engage in cooperative acts for some common ends that they could not obtain on their own. This led Sherif to conclude that only the pursuit of superordinate goals, the goals that can only be achieved by cooperation of conflicting groups, can overcome stereotyping and reduce hostility (Sherif, 1967).

Of course, in real-life conflict settings, it is certainly advisable to avoid over optimism, for the differences separating the parties would be more complex and deeper than the differences created by artificially dividing up school-kids in a summer camp. But nonetheless, having and working on common goals would enhance bonds between the parties in conflict in a number of ways. One would be reducing the salience of group boundaries; that is, people who are working towards common goals are in some sense members of the same group and thus are not so likely to be antagonistic towards each other. Another would be by a reinforcement mechanism; as the two parties work together, each of them rewards the other and produces a sense of gratitude and warmth in the other. Pursuing common goals also means that each party sees itself as working on behalf of the other, a view that is likely to foster positive attitudes (Pruitt et al., 2004: 136-137).

A final strategy that can be utilized to transform hostile inter-group relations would be designing, or re-designing, formal education to serve inter-communal relationship building. In most countries suffering from internal strife, formal education is shaped and used by dominant groups to perpetuate their privileged positions. Further, historical enmities with respect to rival groups are transmitted from generation to generation. Naturally, no social peace is feasible under such circumstances. Thus, if progress is to be made toward internal harmony, educational programs should be planned to this end. In this regard, such programs must definitely avoid any sort of

discrimination and eliminate subjectively-judged historic enmities. They make emphasis, instead, on intellectual and moral qualities, such as critical thinking, openness, scepticism, objectivity and respect for differences. Education of that sort is usually called “peace education” (see, Harris ve Morrison, 2003) and it would be a powerful tool in the hands of any peace builder, for the whole process of child raising may have a critical impact on attitudes and beliefs in later life. In addition, if hostile attitudes and perceptions of one generation are not passed on to the next, then younger generations may be able to deal with inter-group problems in a more constructive atmosphere.

3. CONCLUSION

Many thought that when the half-century of Cold War ended, the world would be freed of conflict unleashed by the ideologies of fascism and communism. It is true that we are unburdened of the contingent threat of nuclear annihilation, but not of conflict. After the Cold War disappeared from center stage, the global drama centered on a rash of small wars, most of them inside the borders of states. These conflicts can be as serious, costly and intense as any in the past, which require effective resolution strategies so that internal, regional, as well as global peace can be secured.

This article has aimed at developing a comprehensive peace approach to internal strives that may be helpful in their resolution process. It has been addressed, in this respect, that internal conflicts are dynamic processes that escalate and de-escalate over time. Hence, when violence breaks out, peacekeeping is required as the most urgent peace strategy, since without separating antagonists and reducing psychical violence, it is impossible to handle the conflict. But once peacekeeping introduces a cooling off period, it must be accompanied by peace making efforts, involving areas of de-centralization, democratization, distributive justice and economic development, confidence building, as well as international cooperation, as summarized above. If extensive use of military force, in the form of peacekeeping, goes on despite de-escalation in violence, this would create new problems and re-escalate internal conflicts. Similarly, if peacekeeping is attempted, but nothing else later, the result would be the re-entry of the problem, since without proper peace making efforts, peacekeeping by itself cannot reverse the underlying causes of these conflicts. As a result, there is a need for a multi-level peace strategy

combining peacekeeping and peace making adequately in the process of resolving internal conflicts of the post-Cold War era.

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