

COOPERATING FOR PEACE: THE UN ROLE IN CONFLICT SITUATIONS

Address by Senator the Hon Gareth Evans QC, Minister for Foreign Affairs, to
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The end of the Cold War ushered in what many of us hoped and believed would be a new era of international cooperation in global security. The United Nations, long prevented by Cold War vetoes from playing the security role its founders had intended, was revitalised. The number of Security Council resolutions certainly increased considerably, and the UN has been much more frequently involved in conflict resolution.

Since 1986, the UN has fielded more new peace keeping missions than in all its previous history, while between 1990 and 1993 the numbers of UN personnel in the field increased from just over 10,000 to more than 82,000 (dropping back only a little this year, to just over 70,000).

In particular, the end of the Cold War has seen the rapid development of what has become known as 'expanded peace keeping', most effectively in Namibia and Cambodia. This involves the UN moving beyond a more or less passive observation and monitoring role, to full-scale election organisation, refugee resettlement, human rights development, and civil administration roles. Despite the inevitable mistakes and the usual problems of under-resourcing, 'expanded peacekeeping' has been a genuine, if unheralded, UN success story.

Partly because of this success in its wider peacekeeping role - and partly because of the dramatic, and brutally effective, peace enforcement operation against Iraq after its invasion of Kuwait - expectations of what the UN could achieve rapidly escalated. But hopes that it might come to play a much more pervasive and effective security role were brought rapidly back to earth by its apparent impotence to intervene quickly or usefully in Bosnia, Somalia or Rwanda. It is now clear that much of the optimism about the UN's potential global security role in the immediate post Cold War period was unwarranted: when effective action was most wanted, the UN was found to be wanting.

The most obvious problem is not so much with traditional inter-state conflict, which for a variety of reasons is becoming increasingly rare, but with ethnic, nationalist, and religious driven intra-state conflict: 79 of the 82 armed conflicts which occurred around the globe between 1989 and 1992 were of this intra-state character.

Throughout what has been called the "zone of conflict", which includes the former communist states, much of sub-Saharan Africa, and parts of Central and Latin America

and South Asia, a downward spiral of economic decline, often exacerbated by official corruption and mismanagement, has created governments which are at or near collapse and which are being challenged, often violently, by their own citizens. Economic decline has hastened the process of national disintegration, and vice versa. The combination has led in extreme cases to the "broken back state" syndrome evident in Somalia, Rwanda and elsewhere.

The available evidence strongly suggests that violent intra-state conflict is unlikely to decrease of its own accord in the near or mid-term future. The decline in individual living standards, and the erosion of good governance, with which civil strife is so closely linked, will not be quickly reversed anywhere in the zone of conflict although the states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union at least have established infrastructure and systems of education and administration which give them considerably firmer bases on which to build than those, for example, in most African states.

In adjusting expectations to realities, we have to re-examine and decide what the function of the UN is supposed to be, particularly in relation to so-called internal matters. We should think again about how the international community might do more to enhance security than we have managed so far. This means, in particular, rethinking some of the conceptual foundations of international security responses; giving much greater emphasis than hitherto to preventive, as distinct from corrective, strategies; and giving much more serious and sustained attention to organisational reform, particularly within the UN.

The first need is to get away from the traditional concept of '*collective security*' which has dominated thinking about the UN's security role for so long, toward the more embracing, and more prevention-oriented, concept of '*cooperative security*'. As developed in *Cooperating for Peace*, cooperative security is a single conceptual theme that effectively encompasses, and captures the essence of three separate ideas - collective security, common security and comprehensive security. In international relations, probably even more so than elsewhere, language has its own substantive significance. The choice of particular words or phrases often carries with it particular mindsets, some more open or closed than others. The virtue, and utility, of the expression "cooperative security" is that this language itself encourages an open and constructive mindset, one less likely to be inhibited by familiar disciplinary boundaries and traditional state-centric security thinking. The term tends to connote consultation rather than confrontation, reassurance rather than deterrence, transparency rather than secrecy, and interdependence rather than unilateralism.

Of course linguistic labels, and the mindsets that may or may not go with them, still only go part of the way. The central task is for the international community - and its principal organ, the United Nations - to develop a new and more sharply focused sense of international responsibility when it comes to dealing with deadly conflict, and in particular intra-state conflict. To achieve this, there is a need to pay closer attention to just what the

UN Charter allows, and inhibits, in this respect.

Traditional thinking sees security essentially in terms of protecting the physical and political integrity of states. The UN's security role, on this view, is limited to the maintenance of "international peace and security", with "international" being taken to require a cross-border element - direct border transgression, external support for internally warring parties, refugee spill-over effects or some other similarly explicit impact. As pressures grew, after the Cold War, for recognition of a "right of humanitarian intervention" in response to various crises, developing countries regularly expressed concerns that this might presage a new era of imperialism, with an American-led Security Council using humanitarian crises as a vehicle for heavy-handedly forcing its will on states whose forms of governance it dislikes.

But as time has gone on, these concerns have been expressed less substantively and more ritualistically. Less attention has been paid to formal jurisdictional limits on intervention, and more and more simply to its likely effectiveness. The UN's reluctance to intervene decisively in Bosnia, Somalia, Haiti and Rwanda has had much more to do with an absence of political will in the Security Council to provide the necessary resources than any perceived constraints imposed by international law. As Sir Anthony Parsons, former British Ambassador to the UN, has recently noted, "Where there is a will to intervene, a way can always be found around the legalistic obstacles".

All that said, it is still helpful to take a fresh look at possible doctrinal foundations, within the UN Charter itself, for a more wide-ranging security role for UN organs than traditional, state-centred doctrine would allow. It is not merely a matter of having theory catch up with practice, although the virtue of that, if one wants to consolidate a practice, should not be underestimated. The more compelling consideration is that the international will to intervene decisively and helpfully in intra-state conflict situations - even when on the conscience-shocking scale of Rwanda - has been conspicuously flagging, and needs some reinjected momentum.

Two lines of approach seem particularly worthy of further exploration, and in a forthcoming article in the journal *Foreign Policy* I will be spelling this out a little more. The first is to develop the notion that "security", as it appears in the UN Charter, is as much about the protection of individuals as it is about the defence of the territorial integrity of states. "*Human security*", thus understood, is at least as much prejudiced by major intra-state conflict as it is by inter-state conflict. The second approach, which could either stand alone or be seen as reinforcing the "human security" approach, is one that would pursue to its logical limits the international community's obligations, under the UN Charter, to protect basic *human rights*, bearing in mind that the most basic human right of all, that to life, is regularly violated on a very large scale in intra-state conflicts.

Now it is one thing to construct a rationale to justify international interest and ultimately intervention in intra-state as well as inter-state disputes or conflicts; it is quite another thing to determine when and how it would be appropriate for that interest to be expressed, or the intervention mounted, in particular cases; and it is something else again to mobilise the international commitment and resources necessary to give practical effect to such involvement. What is absolutely clear, in a world where commitment and resources are always likely to fall short of aspirations and expectations, is that it makes far more sense to concentrate efforts on peace building and other preventive strategies than on after-the-event peace restoration. This holds as much for intra- as for inter-state conflicts: violent conflicts are always far more difficult and costly to manage and resolve than non-violent disputes, and failed states are extremely difficult to join back together again.

Peace building is a long-term preventive strategy which focuses on potential causes of insecurity. It seeks to encourage equitable economic development, to enhance human rights and to facilitate good governance. These goals should be pursued not only for their own sakes but also because making progress towards them contributes powerfully to national and international security.

There are some reasons for long term optimism on the peace building front. According to the UNDP, the proportion of the world's population living in abject poverty fell from 70 percent in 1960 to 32 percent in 1992. The global system is slowly becoming more democratic with more than half of the world's population now living under relatively pluralistic governments. Unfortunately the areas which suffer the greatest levels of intra-state violence are also those in which economic conditions are declining and governments are failing. The aid policies of the developed world bear some responsibility for these failures. Two-thirds of the world's 1.3 billion poor people live in countries which receive less than one third of overseas development assistance (ODA). Long term strategies for building global security will need to redress such imbalances.

There needs to be a higher profile within the UN system for peace building, and better coordination of the different UN, regional and national efforts which address different parts of the peace building agenda. Peace building is at the intersection point between the UN system's political and security agenda and its economic, social, and cultural agenda; this gives it the opportunity to derive resonance and momentum from both, but also to fall between two stools. It is unrealistic to expect the Secretary-General and his personal cabinet to be able to play the necessary oversight and coordinating role; flat management structures are administratively fashionable, but the present UN system, whereby some forty separate departments, offices, agencies, instrumentalities and commissions report directly to the Secretary-General, carries this to absurdity.

High level attention to, and coordination of, peace building programs in selected states would be best accomplished by creating a Deputy Secretary General with responsibility for both peace building and humanitarian affairs, as part of a larger necessary

administrative reorganisation of the UN Secretariat.

Preventive strategies have to address not only the underlying causes of insecurity but actual disputes which may, if not resolved, deteriorate into armed conflict. Peace building, then, has to be supplemented by **preventive diplomacy**. This term embraces a variety of strategies to resolve, or at least contain, disputes by relying on diplomatic and similar methods rather than military ones - essentially the "peaceful means" (including negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration and judicial settlement) described in Article 33 of the UN Charter. Like peace-building it tends, by its very nature, to be a low profile activity and succeeds when things *don't* happen. It is thus not surprising that its many quiet successes should have gone both unnoticed and unheralded. In the UN context, preventive diplomacy may be seen as an antidote to the crisis orientation of the Security Council - where the "too little too late" syndrome means that conflicts get dealt with at the point when peaceful means of dispute resolution are least likely to be effective.

The UN, however, devotes relatively few resources to preventive diplomacy, even though this approach is now universally acknowledged to be the most cost-effective means of dealing with conflicts. There are currently only some 40 UN officials assigned to preventive diplomacy tasks. A large increase in the UN's capability could be achieved at minimal cost. The creation of, say, six regional preventive diplomacy centres with a total staff of one hundred, effectively resourced including with necessary travel funds, would cost little more than \$US20 million a year. By comparison the UN's peace keeping budget for 1993 was \$3.7 billion, and the Gulf War's military cost to the UN coalition was in excess of \$70 billion.

Current thinking on early preventive diplomacy, drawing on the huge body of learning about dispute resolution in other contexts, places a strong emphasis on *process*; there is a broad consensus that preventive diplomacy missions should in general be informal, low-key, non-binding, non-judgmental, non-coercive and confidential. But while early warning, and the emphasis on avoiding the destabilising dynamics of conflict escalation and so on, are critically important, it is equally important to think creatively about *outcomes*, in particular the kinds of political arrangements which might contain and reverse the spread of intra-state conflicts in the long term. This will require, above all, concerted efforts to find creative political solutions, involving in particular power sharing strategies, to the problem of disaffected national minorities. Such solutions must uphold the right of minorities to their own culture, freedom of religion and language, but do not have to involve the creation of countless new mini-states - not least because of the violence which is so often associated with state-making.

Restoring Peace. While prevention is always better than cure, a credible international capacity to deal with conflicts is needed for cases when all other measures have failed. In the case of intra-state conflict, peace enforcement involves some difficult threshold *conceptual* problems, which I have already referred to. It also involves, as do all forms of

UN intervention, different questions of *criteria*. I have spelt out in *Cooperating for Peace* [pp. 156-157] a suggested check list of considerations which should govern any decision to mount a military enforcement action in support of humanitarian objectives, and won't repeat that exercise here.

Intervention also involves the question of *capacity*. Being a suitable case for treatment is never itself going to be enough, given resource constraints, to guarantee it. But, as one commentator recently put it, the impossibility of intervening everywhere should not bar the UN from acting anywhere: the international community must accept the inevitability of what might be called opportunistic idealism. It is becoming apparent, however, that this brand of idealism is in increasingly short supply: as the initial response to the horror in Rwanda starkly demonstrated, it is becoming increasingly difficult to get the UN's member states to intervene forcibly *anywhere*, at least when vital national interests are not seen to be immediately involved.

The unhappy reality is that, in the absence of threats to vital perceived interests, it is extraordinarily difficult for democratic states to sustain domestic support for distant and risky military operations overseas - even when governments may wish to do so. It is difficult to believe that international public education programs will make much difference. Can the problem of member state resistance to involvement in dangerous UN operations be resolved by creating a professional volunteer UN standing force? Sir Brian Urquhart has been a persistent advocate of this approach, not only to solve the commitment problem, but also to have a *rapid* deployment capacity able to get to conflict sites, and hopefully to defuse them, much faster than is possible when each new UN operation has to be laboriously assembled from a zero base.

Although the idea of the UN standing force has in the past been ruled out as unrealistic (including by me), the UN's recent impotence in the face of genocide gives cause for reconsideration. Clearly, however, the force of 5000 troops proposed by Urquhart would be too small, even if its purpose was simply to mount initial operations which would subsequently be taken over by UN forces constituted on a more orthodox basis. You may have heard, on ABC Radio recently, General Lewis McKenzie making the point that such a small rapid reaction force could now have been sent to Kigali, because it would already have been preoccupied in Gorazde...

Cost will be the key reason, although not the only one, for member states resisting the creation of a rapid reaction force of any size. But, again, if there really is a will to tackle this issue, there are plenty of ways available. The scale of the problem - if not its solution - is demonstrated by making the point that if 5 percent of member states' current defence spending were devoted to the UN, this would provide the world body with a security budget of some \$40 billion a year - more than ten times the current peace keeping budget. I have spelt out in *Cooperating for Peace* a number of money-raising ideas, including a

small levy on international air travel. Another proposal, a turnover tax on foreign-exchange transactions of, say, 0.01 percent, was given recent respectability by *The Economist's* description of it as "a nice idea".

Even if the world can never be made absolutely safe for all its peoples, we are beginning to learn how to make it much safer than it has been. Technology, trade and telecommunications are bringing us closer together. Across national borders institutions, practices, and outlooks are becoming more alike. As a result countries, cultures and peoples are becoming less alien to each other than has been the case in the past. The ideal of nations and communities living and working together in peace and security - enjoying, in the words of the UN Charter, "better standards of life in larger freedom" - *should* be closer now to realisation than at any previous time in modern world history. Expectations have been both raised and dashed by the swirl of events since the end of the Cold War. But there are signs - certainly in Europe, the Americas, the Asia Pacific and maybe at last even in the Middle East - of a culture of cooperation beginning to emerge to replace the culture of conflict that has prevailed so long.

This mood must now be systematically tapped and translated into effective institutional structures and processes, above all through the UN, the only fully empowered cooperative security body with global membership that we have. Change needs a measure of intellectual consensus among decision makers as to applicable principles, and a clearly defined set of practical proposals for reform. But it also needs commitment, and stamina, from the governments and individuals who, at the end of the day, have to make it happen. Member states of the UN, when they accede to its Charter, commit to its *whole* agenda: and that means cooperating to achieve peace, security, stability and well-being both among and within states. There could be no better time than now for renewal of that commitment, and no better target date for making it all happen than next year's 50th Anniversary of the coming into force of the United Nations Charter.

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