

The Theory and Practice of Peacekeeping in the 1990s

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The Theory and Practice of Peacekeeping in the 1990s

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In this presentation, I am principally interested in what the connection is between theorisation about international cooperation and the practice of peace operations in the 1990s. I begin with a brief comment on the differences between historical and political science approaches to the subject of international relations. I follow with a discussion of the major theoretical questions that underlie the practice of peace support. I then move on to a general review of practice after the end of the Cold War. And I conclude with a number of observations of the relationship (or lack of it) between international relations theory and this element of multilateral practice.

History and Political Science

Concerning the differences between historians and political scientists, as I understand it, historians ask what happened and why, with regard to discrete events and processes. They are not particularly interested in theory (that is to say, generalised statements about cause and effect). Indeed, they may be suspicious of such attempts. Every case has specific qualities that are essential in understanding why things turned out the way they did. That makes the effort to compare suspect from the outset. From this perspective, the wisdom of making universal generalisations is questionable. On the other hand, such generalisations may be useful in organising historical analysis, in suggesting places that the historian might fruitfully go, what questions he might ask, and what he might fruitfully look for in seeking to understand a particular sequence of events.

The political scientist (or at least those who work in the tradition of American positivism), in contrast, is interested in identifying general causal propositions or theories. The historical record is valuable to the political scientist in confirming or disconfirming these general deductive propositions. Inductive analysis assists in refining hypotheses as a basis for greater analytical and predictive traction. In this respect, while, for the historian, historical analysis is an end in itself and has intrinsic value, for the political scientist it is a means to an end. Historical analysis provides background information for systematic efforts to comprehend social process.

Theoretical Perspectives

The most fundamental theoretical problem in this sphere concerns the phenomenon of international cooperation itself. Following Robert Keohane, I take cooperation to mean the adjustment of policy and/or behaviour to take into account the preferences of others. The literature on international relations strikes non-specialists as somewhat odd in its treatment of cooperation in that it puzzles over whether cooperation is, indeed, even possible. This seems a stupid question. We see cooperation all around us. However, the cooperation we see generally occurs in small groups in which there is a significant degree of trust. Alternatively, cooperation takes place on the basis of shared rules that are enforced by traditionally or legally constituted authorities.

That is the problem in IR. The international system is widely deemed to be anarchic, in the sense of having no recognised authority that is in a position to lay down the law to others and to enforce that law. It is also pluralistic, comprising a large number of states. These states are sovereign, in the sense that they exercise control over what goes on within their borders (internal sovereignty) and their right to do so is recognised by other states (external sovereignty). The interests of states arguably derive from this anarchic and pluralistic structure of sovereign states, and the uneven distribution of power within it.

This understanding of the international system is widely shared (if to varying degrees and with differing emphases) by most of the theoretical traditions in international relations. But what implications do these propositions have for the state behaviour and for their propensity to cooperate, not least in the quest for peace?

Neorealism

There are three principal theoretical perspectives on international cooperation. The first is the neorealist version. Neorealists and, for that matter, realists generally accept that, given the absence of authoritative and effective enforcement mechanisms in the international system, states essentially have to rely on themselves for security. All other things being equal, the rational response to this situation is to maximise power. Efforts to accumulate power in turn threaten other states, creating competition for power and the security dilemma. In short, this is not a particularly promising environment for co-operation between states.

The structure of international relations (anarchy, pluralism), and the consequent state preoccupation with power, impose significant limits on interstate cooperation. To survive, states must emphasise their own interests. In so doing, where cooperative endeavours interfere with the pursuit of egoistic interest, the latter will carry the day. This is the problem of cheating or defection. Second, even where, in absolute terms, a state gains from cooperating with others, it is not absolute gains that matter; relative gains are what counts. In the competitive environment of the state of nature, actors must be permanently preoccupied with where they stand vis-à-vis other actors. It doesn't matter whether we are both better off as a result of our cooperation. If you gain twice as much as I do, then I am weaker relative to you than I was before we began to cooperate. And so again, I will refuse to cooperate or I will not continue to cooperate.

This is not to say that no cooperation is possible. States can and do cooperate on discrete matters where they have strong mutual interests. This is the essence of alliance theory. But neorealism suggests that such cooperation will be limited in both extent and duration. Alliances disappear when the threat that occasions their formation is eliminated or disappears.

It bears mention that this is a highly static and pessimistic account of international relations. There is no meliorist or reformist agenda. Things are the way they are. They cannot be changed. And indeed, from a prudential perspective, the effort to reform the system might carry greater costs than benefits.

There is one other implication directly relevant to the analysis of peace-keeping operations, now as then. Power is a scarce resource. States do not squander it lightly. That is, they are unlikely to invest significant resources in circumstances where vital interests are at stake.

There are obvious empirical problems with this approach. First, the approach takes no account of the emergence on non-state actors and their apparently growing role in influencing outcomes in international relations. Second, it doesn't adequately account for the degree of state compliance with norms and rules even when these run counter to immediate egoistic interests. For example, most states abide by most international treaties most of the time. And they frequently pay a price for doing so. Third, it fails to account for the breadth and durability of cooperation in international relations. The numbers of multilateral organisations have grown exponentially in the post-World War II era. Their functional coverage has broadened dramatically. "One glance at the annual *Yearbook of International Organization* should be enough to convince all but the most sceptical observer of the extent to which our lives have become increasingly entwined with multilateral international organizations."¹ Fourth, specific examples, such as the failure of NATO to disappear, appear to be direct challenges to the conception of alliance cooperation as partial and of limited duration. Something else must be at work here.

Realists are not stupid people, and they have an answer to this problem. Not surprisingly, it rests on the distribution of power in the system. Particular configurations of power can foster cooperation, because cooperation is in the interest of the most powerful. This is the point of departure for various forms of hegemonic stability theory. Here, the argument is that hegemons seek to organise international relations in such a way as to benefit from them, and to sustain their dominance of the system. They sponsor the institutions, and they define the underlying principles. The institutions and principles are backed up by the hegemon's power to persuade and power to punish.

Hegemonic power, in other words, limits both problems (defection and relative gains) just identified and explains the depth and breadth of international cooperation under conditions of anarchy. Institutions that benefit the hegemon thrive; those that don't wither. Such approaches may have considerable value in explaining the evolution of cooperative institutions in the West during the Cold War. They may also go some distance in explaining post-Cold War phenomena, such as the persistence of NATO (it survived because the United States has sought to use it for purposes different from those on the basis of which it was founded in 1949, not least to prevent the emergence of an independent European security institution). However, they are of little value in explaining the emergence of cooperative arrangements in defiance of the hegemon – for example, the Kyoto Protocol, the Ottawa Convention on Land Mines, and the treaty establishing the ICC.

Neoliberalism

¹ From Rosemary Foot, S. Neil MacFarlane, and Michael Mastanduno, Introduction," in *idem.*, *US Hegemony and International Organizations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp.2-3.

Problems such as these have occasioned alternative attempts to explain cooperation theoretically. One is the neoliberal version propounded by Robert Keohane. Neoliberals accept the point of departure of realism. They see international relations as a system of interaction amongst rationally acting monolithic actors – states. These states seek to maximise their individual gains. However, neoliberals see the potential for durable cooperative behaviour to be substantially greater than do neorealists. This is because multilateral institutions enhance communication, stabilise expectations, and enhance predictability. In other words they foster a social context for atomistic states where states come to know each other. The repeated experience of cooperation – and the gains therefrom – will cause states not so much to redefine their interests or preferences, but to reconsider the means by which they pursue these interests. The widening net of cooperative relations also creates possibilities for punishing states that do not abide by the rules. Defection in one issue area may carry costs in others.

Moreover, institutions cast a shadow on the future. If a state cheats or defects from a regime, other states will be reluctant to cooperate with it and it will therefore be difficult for the defector to reap gains from cooperation in the future. In other words, while short term perceived interests might suggest non-cooperation, the longer term costs of defection might favour trading off short term gains against longer term ones. Most neoliberals would agree that hegemony is necessary for the establishment of cooperative institutions. However, as states develop the habits of cooperation, as expectations are stabilised, and as states learn the benefits of collaboration, they may develop interests in the persistence of institutionalised cooperation even as power relations change.

Although this account of international cooperation does provide a reasonably compelling basis for contesting neorealist arguments regarding defection, this leaves open the question of relative gains. Here the obvious point to make is that a state's sensitivity to the problem of relative gains is likely to vary across issue areas. On many issues (e.g. environmental cooperation or cooperation on health issues), differential gains are likely to have little impact on the power position of the state. Nigeria stands to gain more than America through effective cooperation in the effort to control malaria, but this differential will have little effect on America's willingness to cooperate, because Nigeria's relative gain in this respect has little effect on America.

Matters become somewhat more complex in the area of economic cooperation (for example, free trading regimes), since economic power is fungible. States can translate economic gains into useable force. It stands to reason, therefore, that states would be more sensitive to relative gains in this area of cooperation. However, such things take time. Damage to the state's relative power position is slow and there is time to adjust. In such circumstances, states may trade off longer term relative losses against short-term absolute gains for some time. We see this arguably in the evolving Sino-American trading and investment relationship.

This brings me finally to the area of security cooperation. Most would agree that relative gains issues, and the impediments they pose to interstate cooperation are likely to be particularly strong in security. In the first place, military power is a scarce resource. It tends to be used in pursuit of clear state interests. Secondly, mistakes can cause severe damage. To illustrate – let us assume that India and Pakistan had both

joined the nuclear non-proliferation regime, and that India had honoured its obligations while Pakistan had cheated and developed a nuclear weapon. The result would have been a substantial and possibly fatal erosion of India's power-political position in South Asia. Not surprisingly, neither state chose to participate in this security cooperation regime. In this respect, both neoliberalism and neorealism provide little hope for substantial multilateral security cooperation, a point of obvious relevance to the peace and security role of the UN.

Classical Liberalism

Before moving on to peacekeeping, I should mention a third variant of theory concerning cooperation, which contests the point of departure of both realism and neoliberalism. Classical liberal theory rejects the notion that relations between states are inherently conflictual. Indeed, they would argue that growing interdependence among states reduces the potential for interstate conflict. Moreover, the essential focus of liberalism is the individual, not the state. Normatively, the focus of liberal theory is on the maximisation of individual freedom and welfare. States are not ends in themselves. They are means to ends. The fundamental challenge for liberals in domestic politics is to create a system of domestic governance that enhances individual capacities to pursue their own preferences.

Classical liberals recognise that the international context may affect the capacity to create and maintain domestic governance that promotes individual freedom. So the liberal challenge in international relations is to create and sustain an international system that promotes the freedom of individuals and their capacity to maximise their individual potential. The contradictions and conflicts between states are the result of faults in their design and construction. Peace is, therefore, possible if both states and institutions are properly designed or reformed.

The domestic level was well covered in the work of Immanuel Kant, and his later disciples (e.g. Michael Doyle). Since (as they maintain) democratic states do not fight each other, the problems of peace and security would be resolved if all states were democratic. Theoretically, what is interesting here is that the distribution of power does not matter; what matters is expectations. The expectation is that, since democratic states, *ceteris paribus*, are internally focused and welfare-oriented, they will not act aggressively unless they feel threatened. Since other democratic states are similarly focused and oriented, they will not appear to be threatening.

On the other hand, the agenda regarding non-democratic states is implicitly aggressive. They stand in the way of peace and therefore should be fixed. This crusading message is clearly evident in Woodrow Wilson's notion that the world had to be made safe for democracy by externally based efforts to reform of non-democratic states. It also appears clear in current discussion of what is going on in Iraq.

At the level of international institutions, the liberal project has leaned towards the creation of institutions that will contain if not resolve the problem of war. In the extreme, this implies the creation of a world government, the functions of which would closely parallel those of domestic governments. Hence Kant proposed the establishment of a liberal federation. Less ambitiously, liberal thinking leads naturally to the concept of collective security. Here, the idea is that all states participating in the

system would commit themselves to the proposition that if one state were attacked, all the others would defend the victim of aggression. In such circumstances, war would disappear, because no single state could hope to prevail over all the others.

At both the domestic and international levels, the liberal normative agenda is inherently meliorist or reformist, if not utopian. Moreover, in some respects it is a cosmopolitan rather than a pluralist agenda. For liberals, human beings are entitled to dignity and respect because they are human beings. This suggests that we all have a degree of obligation to each other. And so, concern for the fate of individuals within other states is not merely instrumental (the quest for peace); it is essential.

This suggests a fundamentally different take on sovereignty. Sovereignty has no intrinsic value; states enjoy sovereign rights to the extent that they respect the rights of their citizens. If they don't, their sovereignty is correspondingly diminished. Liberal solidarism also suggests a different take on the use of military power. The notion that we may be obliged to promote and defend the basic rights of individuals within other states adds a further dimension to the interventionist thrust of liberal normative theory.

Before going on to consider the contemporary practice of the use of power in pursuit of peace, it is worth pointing out several problems with this liberal view of international politics. In the most general sense, despite its claims to universality, it is not and never has been universally accepted. Nor is there any clear evidence that it is coming to be so. Many outside the West see the focus on the individual as corrosive of the community. It is not obvious why others should accept its claim to universality, since it is a product of a specific historical experience (that of Enlightenment and modernising Europe). Many newer states (and not so new ones – *e.g.* China) are content with the Westphalian dispensation – *cuius rex, eius religio*, and see little merit in a post-Westphalian liberal reform of the states system, or for liberal reform of their own states. Many in the West consider militarised solidarism to be a recipe for permanent conflict if not chaos, since Western impositions will be resisted.

More specifically, the empirical record of collective security is not encouraging. There are two major episodes. One is the experience of the League of Nations, where, perhaps unfortunately, states were not willing to sacrifice short term interests for longer term *milieu* goals. The result was the discrediting of the League and of the idealist moment in interwar international politics.

The second concerned the operation of the principle of collective security within the United Nations. The one Cold War case where the UN as an organisation mandated a forceful response to an act of interstate aggression was the collective action commanded by the United States in Korea. The only reason that it proceeded under UN Security Council auspices was that the Soviet representative on the Security Council was boycotting Council sessions. Once he came back, that window was closed.

Summary

I suppose the key point to conclude with is that while neorealism and neoliberalism differ substantially on general prospects for multilateral cooperation in international

relations, they agree that prospects for cooperation in the area of security (beyond alliances of convenience in the face of imminent threats) are poor, largely because of the salience of relative gains. In contrast, the liberal tradition has a fundamentally more optimistic view of the potential for interstate cooperation in pursuit of peace, and in pursuit of liberal values.

The Theory and Practice of Peacekeeping

The Cold War

This brings me to the practice of peacekeeping and its relation to theory in the 1990s. A preliminary few words are needed, however, on the Cold War period, to serve as a basis for comparison. At its inception, the United Nations reflected a curious blend of liberalism and realism. On the one hand, the United Nations was organised with the purpose of collectively managing international security. The Charter outlawed aggression (2.4), and (in Chapter VII) laid out the legal basis for international response to threats to international peace and security. In its apparent effort to outlaw aggressive war, the Charter follows directly in the liberal tradition of the League of Nations.

On the other hand, and responding to defects in the League, the Charter adds a decidedly realist twist. It recognised that collective responses to threats to international peace and security were unlikely to be effective if decision-making power were spread equally across the membership, and so it was concentrated in the hands of the states that were most powerful at the time the Charter was drafted, the permanent members of the Security Council. And, since such responses were unlikely to be effective without consensus among the most powerful, the Charter provided veto powers to those five states. The emergence of bipolarity – in conjunction with the veto – largely explained the weakness of the UN's role in international security for much of the period from 1950 to 1985. The absence of effective international security cooperation is easily covered, not surprisingly, by realist approaches; systemic competition between the two superpowers and their allies precluded any significant collective decision-making in the Council or collective action by the United Nations in responding to threats to international peace and security.²

Realism also does pretty well in explaining such peace keeping as did emerge. In Suez in 1956, for example, the two superpowers found themselves with a crisis not of their own making and with substantial prospects for escalating into a serious confrontation that neither wanted. The insertion of UNEF provided a means of avoiding that outcome. Likewise, in the Congo, the insertion of ONUC allowed the superpowers to avoid a potentially costly competitive intervention in an area of marginal strategic importance to them.

Where these conditions did not hold, the capacity to respond collectively to threats to international peace and security was very limited. The absence of any effort to deal with the intervention in Hungary, the Vietnam Wars, the Nigerian civil war, the

² It is unsurprising in this context that realists of the Cold War era had little if anything to say about the peacekeeping activities of the United Nations in the effort to regulate the system of international security. See, for example, Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

intervention in Czechoslovakia, the repeated crises in the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s, the various post-independence civil conflicts in Southern Africa, the Iran-Iraq War, and the *auto-génocide* in Cambodia, are illustrative.

It also bears mention that – where they were permitted – UN peace-keeping operations were, in military terms, distinctly unambitious. UN-based multilateral military deployments generally occurred in conditions of suspension of hostilities with the consent of the parties. They were not mandated under Chapter VII. Traditional deployments generally occurred along lines of contact and after disengagement. They were intended to provide reassurance that hostilities might not inadvertently or advertently resume. In other words, they were there to maintain and enhance a stable military environment while the parties sought to resolve their dispute by political means. Blue helmets were lightly armed, so as not to seem threatening. Their mandate stressed impartiality. Their rules of engagement permitted the use of force only in self-defence.

The fundamental point is clear. As realist theory would predict, in a highly competitive international system, the potential for multilateral cooperation in addressing conflict within the international system is distinctly limited.

The Post-Cold War Era

If bipolarity and superpower competition imposed significant constraints on security cooperation during the Cold War, then one might expect the disappearance of these structures to open up substantial space for multilateral efforts to promote international peace and security, as well as other humane values. On the other hand, if the problem is deeper – that prospects for such cooperation are inherently low as a result of anarchy and pluralism – then one might expect that change in the distribution of power would not create a substantial momentum towards international (or transnational) liberalism.

It is useful to begin here by asking how peace operations in the post-Cold War era differed from UN operations during the Cold War.

If we accept the definition of traditional peacekeeping outlined above, the operations of the 1990s showed variation along all of its axes. In a number of instances, the operations were not organised and managed by the UN Secretariat, but instead were based on coalitions of the willing or on regional arrangements (Chapter VIII or not). UN or UN-mandated forces were deployed into situations where there was no suspension of hostilities or where ceasefires were fragile and often broken. Lines of separation were often incomplete and unstable. Consent was also often incomplete and unstable. A broad array of tasks were added, from peace enforcement to protection of relief and humanitarian assistance providers. Many operations came to include substantial human rights monitoring and electoral assistance components. In weak or failed states, peace operations expanded to include post-conflict peace-building tasks. The expansion of tasks implied the engagement of larger numbers of civilian personnel and agencies, creating real challenges of coordination. The cohabitation of peace operations with substantial humanitarian assistance delivery brought peacekeepers into much more sustained contact with non-governmental organisations, complicating the coordination problem further. *In extremis*, as in

Kosovo and East Timor, the UN took on a substantial role in the administration of war-torn territories, effectively assuming sovereign authority.

Many of these expansions or changes reflected liberal commitments. In a number of cases (e.g. Haiti, Sierra Leone), the overthrow of democratic regimes was ultimately defined as a threat to international peace and security. Others (e.g. Somalia, Bosnia) reflected a solidarist concern to address violations of basic human rights (e.g. the right to humanitarian assistance). Still others addressed the protection needs of displaced persons (e.g. the safety zones resolutions in northern Iraq and also Bosnia). In the extreme, the UN mandated interventions to rescue human beings in peril.

The message one gets, in short is a transition from realist to liberal behaviour. And this transition posed a substantial challenge to key principles of the Westphalian international system. Notably, these peace operations largely concerned not interstate conflict (which largely disappeared in the post-Cold War era), but internal affairs normally considered within the domestic jurisdiction of sovereign states. Secretaries General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and Kofi Annan explicitly challenged the principle of sovereignty as traditionally construed. Boutros-Ghali averred in 1992 that the time of absolute sovereignty had passed. Kofi Annan, following Francis Deng, suggested that sovereignty should be redefined in terms of responsibility. To the extent that a state met its responsibilities in the protection of its citizens, it enjoyed sovereign rights. To the extent that it could not or would not meet these responsibilities, it didn't.

Several qualifications are, however, necessary. First, in numerous instances where human beings were equally at risk, the UN or coalitions mandated by the UN did not intervene. Rwanda comes to mind, as does the Congo and Chechnya. In contrasting cases where liberal interventions did occur with those where, in equally or more compelling circumstances it did not, one is driven to the conclusion that commitments of substantial military resources depended on the level of perceived interest of major states. Where this interest was not evident (as in Rwanda) and/or where the human rights agenda conflicted with the power-political interests of major states (as in Chechnya), forceful peace operations did not occur, or, as in Kosovo, they did occur but outside the UN mandating machinery (as in Kosovo).

Second, and relatedly, examination of UN Security Council processes and mandates suggests considerable discomfort among some powers with the entire idea of intervention in the sovereignty of other states. This discomfort is even more widespread in the General Assembly. Most of the resolutions mandating the actions mentioned above specify the unique circumstances justifying the action, and, consequently, that the action should not be taken to be a precedent for the future. They also tend to reaffirm the sovereignty of the target state, suggesting discomfort with any implication that the principle of sovereignty and the associated principle of non-intervention are in question. Efforts to generalise a right (or obligation) to intervene on humanitarian grounds, such as those of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, have been adamantly (and effectively) resisted.

In short, we can see the evolution of peace operations in terms of a contestation between realist and liberal visions of international relations. The former emphasise the pluralism of international politics, the significance of the sovereign rights of states, and the constraints on the potential for cooperation in such a system, particularly in

the realm of security. The latter privilege the individual rather than the state and are willing to qualify sovereignty in terms of the willingness of capacity of states to fulfil their basic commitments to their citizens. They take a fundamentally more optimistic and reformist view of international relations, and conceive a far broader role for international organisations in addressing issues of human security.

For structural reasons, there was little space for the elaboration of liberal agendas in international politics during the Cold War. At the end of the Cold War, many felt that the space for international cooperation in the quest for peace had been substantially expanded. This was because they assumed that the basic cause of the weakness of cooperation in this sphere was the nature of the Cold War distribution of power. Bipolarity and superpower competition precluded more ambitious efforts to secure durable systemic peace. And, indeed, the expanding agenda of peace operations in the 1990s suggests that there is some truth in this perspective.

However, the experiences of peace operations in the 1990s suggest that this theoretical interpretation is only partly true. The rather bumpy and incomplete record of the post-Cold War era suggests that the distribution of power may not be the real issue. Instead, the underlying issue that explains so much of the difficulty encountered by the UN in its response to the security dilemmas of the post-Cold War era is, in fact, the pluralism of international relations and the egoistic behaviour of the states that comprise it.