

GLOBAL SECURITY AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

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Summary

This chapter provides an overview of how the United Nations (UN) has tried to maintain what the UN Charter refers to as “international peace and security”. In particular, it focuses upon how the UN has responded to the challenges posed by political violence, terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

1. Introduction

In September 2003, in the aftermath of the hugely divisive invasion of Iraq, UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan told the General Assembly members that they faced a fork in the road: either the UN’s member states could come together to devise common solutions to the world’s most pressing security challenges, or they could splinter into factions thereby eroding the UN’s credibility as a collective security organization. He also went on to convene a High-Level Panel of sixteen eminent international civil servants and former diplomats to explore the major security challenges facing the world’s states and their people and to produce new ideas about how the UN could meet these challenges in the twenty-first century. The following year, after much debate, the

High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change published its report, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility*. In it, the panellists identified six clusters of threats as deserving special attention:

- War between states;
- Violence within states, including civil wars, large-scale human rights abuses and genocide;
- Poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation;
- Nuclear, radiological, chemical and biological weapons;
- Terrorism; and
- Transnational organized crime.

Upon presenting this diagnosis to the UN's member states, it quickly became apparent that they disagreed as to which of these clusters should receive priority: some, mainly developed Western states, considered threats from terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to be most pressing, while many states in the developing world thought that most resources should be devoted to tackling armed conflict and economic and social threats.

This essay provides an overview of how the UN has responded to some of these central threats to global security. It focuses on three threats in particular:

- Political violence, including interstate and intrastate armed conflict as well as other forms of organized violence such as non-state conflicts, genocide and other large-scale atrocities;
- Terrorism; and
- Nuclear proliferation.

2. The United Nations and Political Violence

2.1 Contemporary Armed Conflicts: A Short Overview

According to information compiled by the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP), since 1945, a total of 240 armed conflicts involving states have been active in 151 locations around the world. This includes 128 conflicts in 81 locations since the end of the Cold War in 1989. By 2008 there were 36 armed conflicts in 26 locations (see Figure 1 and Harbom and Wallensteen 2009). Most of these are intrastate but only five of them were classified as "major armed conflicts" or wars (in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia). The UCDP defines a major armed conflict as a contested incompatibility concerning government and/or territory over which the use of armed force between the military forces of two parties – of which at least one is the government of a state – has resulted in at least 1,000 battle-related deaths in a single calendar year. In terms of their regional distribution, 27 of the 36 armed conflicts were in Asia or Africa.

One striking feature of these conflicts is the lack of traditional interstate wars. Between 1997 and 2008 there were relatively few interstate wars: Ethiopia vs Eritrea (1998-

2000), India vs Pakistan (1997-2003), DRC and allies vs Rwanda and Uganda (1998-2002), US-led coalition vs the de facto regime in Afghanistan, the US-led coalition vs Iraq (2003), Ethiopia vs the de facto authorities in Somalia (2006-09), and Russia vs Georgia (2008). The trend away from state vs state violence and the significance of armed non-state actors in the contemporary era eventually encouraged the collection of new data about non-state conflicts (defined as the use of armed force between two organized groups, neither of which is the government of a state, which results in at least 25 battle-related deaths per year and per warring dyad). The early results revealed a significant proportion of contemporary armed conflicts are now of the non-state variety (33 in 2002 but dropping to 16 by 2007, see UCDP http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/graphs/non_state_region_2007.gif). Most of these have taken place in Africa, particularly in Ethiopia, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan.

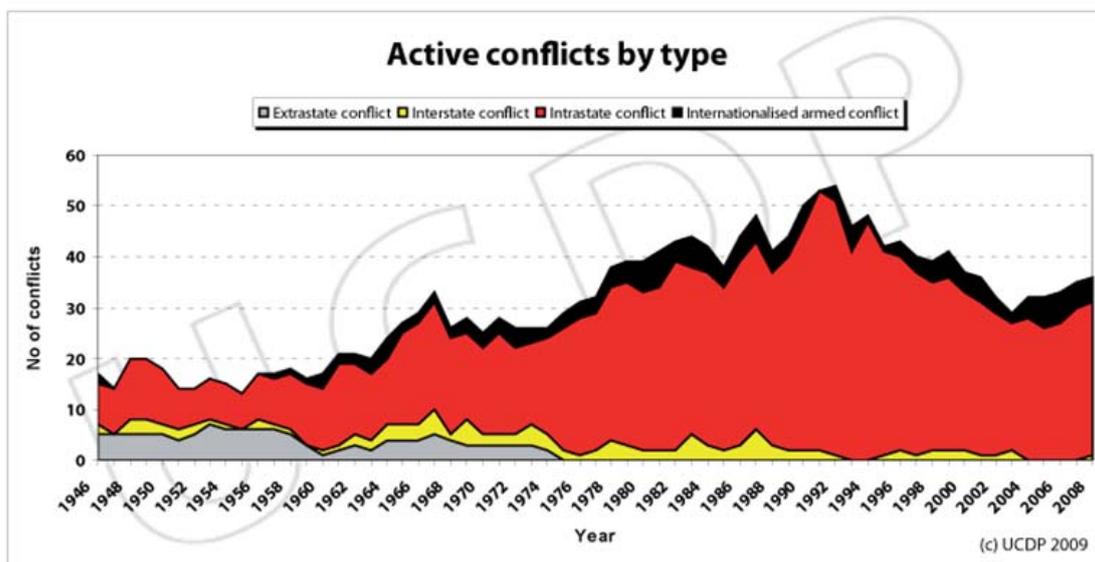


Figure 1: Active Armed Conflicts by Conflict Type and Year, 1946-2008 (Source: UCDP http://www.pcr.uu.se/research/UCDP/graphs/conflict_types_2008.gif)

The decline in interstate war and the predominance of intrastate conflicts and armed non-state actors after the Cold War prompted a flurry of literature that tried to explain these developments. One line of argument suggested that since 1945, and especially after 1989, globalization has given rise to a distinctive form of violent conflict, which was labeled “new wars” (e.g. Kaldor 1999, Duffield 2001, Munkler 2004). In some respects, the label “new” is unhelpful since many of the characteristics identified in these conflicts have a long history. Nevertheless, these analysts captured some of the dynamics shaping contemporary intrastate and non-state armed conflicts.

According to Mary Kaldor’s (1999) version, new wars are distinct from “old wars” in terms of their goals, methods and systems of finance, all of which reflect the ongoing erosion of the state’s monopoly of legitimate organized violence within the context of globalization. In her framework, in new wars the traditional distinctions between traditional conceptions of war (violence between states or organized political groups for

political motives), organized crime (violence by private associations, usually for financial gain), and large-scale violations of human rights (violence by states or private groups against individuals, mainly civilians) become increasingly blurred.

The goals of combatants can be understood in the context of a struggle between cosmopolitan and exclusivist identity groups. The latter are understood to be seeking control of a particular territory by ethnically cleansing everybody of a different identity group or those people who espouse cosmopolitan political opinions. In terms of methods, Kaldor suggests new wars are fought through a novel 'mode of warfare' that draws on both guerrilla techniques and counterinsurgency. Yet this mode of warfare is distinctive inasmuch as decisive engagements are avoided and territory is controlled through political manipulation of a population by sowing 'fear and hatred' rather than winning "hearts and minds". It is thus not surprising that paramilitaries and groups of hired thugs are a common feature of these war zones as they can spread fear and hatred among the civilian population more effectively than professional armed forces. This perspective might help explain the rise in one-sided massacres of civilians identified above. Bands of paramilitary forces are also useful because it can be difficult to trace back responsibility for their actions to political leaders. The final characteristic of Kaldor's new wars is that they are financed through a globalized war economy that is decentralized, increasingly transnational and in which the fighting units are often self-funding through plunder, the black-market or external assistance. The next section examines how the UN can, and has, responded to such conflicts.

2.2 The United Nations Response

Article 1(1) of the UN Charter states that one of the organization's central purposes is "to maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace." In order to rise to this challenge, the UN system can respond to political violence in a variety of ways, not least because of the variety of actors that comprise it and the flexible manner in which the UN Charter's relevant articles can be interpreted.

In terms of the actors within the UN system, the Security Council has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Within the UN Charter, the Security Council's remit is found in Chapters 5-8 and 12. In certain circumstances, however, the General Assembly may also play a leading role. Historically, the General Assembly has authorized peace operations, such as the UNSCOB operation in Greece (1947-51) and the UN Emergency Force (UNEF) in Egypt (1956-1967). The latter case was possible because of what is perhaps the General Assembly's most significant power; the ability to pass so-called "Uniting for Peace" resolutions. First passed in 1950 to counter threats of a Soviet veto of further UN SCRs on Korea, this mechanism allows the Assembly to recommend collective measures when the Security Council is unable to reach a decision. Such a resolution requires the support of a two-thirds majority of the Assembly. The UN Secretary-General is also permitted an important role in responding to political violence. In particular, under Article 99 of the UN Charter, 'The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.'

In addition to the Security Council, General Assembly and Secretary-General, the UN's specialized agencies such as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Food Program (WFP) can also play important roles in responding to political violence by providing practical assistance in the world's conflict zones. Similarly, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank can play important roles in international attempts to rebuild and develop war-torn territories and/or what the World Bank calls "fragile states". Since the end of the Cold War, these international financial institutions have played a much greater and more explicit, albeit controversial, role in attempts to maintain international peace and security.

In relation to the array of possible responses to political violence, it is the Security Council which has tended to act as the UN's primary instrument. It can choose to adopt peaceful or forceful measures in response to instances of political violence.

The peaceful measures at the Security Council's disposal are many and varied but usually fall under Chapters 6 and 8 of the UN Charter. Among the most important and most utilized are:

- *Preventive diplomacy*: This was defined by former Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali (1992) as "action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur." It can involve a variety of activities including confidence building, fact-finding, early warning, preventive deployment of personnel, and the establishment of demilitarized zones.
- *Peacemaking*: This was defined by Boutros-Ghali (1992) as "action to bring hostile parties to agreement, essentially through such peaceful means as those foreseen in Chapter VI of the Charter of the United Nations." It can involve a variety of activities including mediation (which may be conducted by UN agents or subcontracted to other actors, for example, regional arrangements under Chapter 8 of the Charter, or coalitions of states, usually referred to as Groups of Friends of the country in question. The UN may also advise arbitration by referring conflicting parties to the International Court of Justice.
- *Peacekeeping*: This was defined by Boutros-Ghali (1992) as "the deployment of a United Nations presence in the field, hitherto with the consent of all the parties concerned, normally involving United Nations military and/or police personnel and frequently civilians as well." In practice, not all UN-authorized peacekeeping operations contain only UN personnel. The role of traditional peacekeeping operations is to help provide a political breathing space for conflicting parties to begin a process of conflict resolution (see Section 2.3). Particularly since the publication of the Report of the Panel on UN Peace Operations (Brahimi 2000), however, most peace operations have been given the broader and more demanding tasks associated with *peacebuilding* rather than just peacekeeping. This refers to "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (Boutros-Ghali 1992). It should be noted that some peacebuilding mandates include enforcement measures and hence are not always conducted under Chapter 6 of the UN Charter.

The Security Council may also authorize a variety of enforcement measures under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. Once the Security Council has identified a threat to international peace and security under Article 39, it may authorize:

- “Measures not involving the use of armed force” (Article 41): these may include the severance of diplomatic relations or the imposition of economic sanctions such as financial sanctions as well as embargoes and boycotts of particular goods. During the Cold War, the UN imposed sanctions regimes on Rhodesia and South Africa. In the 1990s, however, it imposed over a dozen regimes, sometimes against non-state actors such as insurgency movements in Angola and Afghanistan (see Cortright and Lopez 2000). Before 1994, the UN had tended to rely on general or comprehensive sanctions regimes. After 1994, however, the UN decided to adopt only targeted or “smart” sanctions regimes in recognition of the humanitarian problems caused by the lack of tangible political leverage that comprehensive sanctions regimes could exert on certain regimes.
- “Action by air, sea or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security” (Article 42): this allows the Security Council to authorize military action in response to a threat to international peace and security. The Council may also endorse military action taken by states in self-defense under Article 51 of the UN Charter. Especially since the end of the Cold War, the Security Council has operated with a broader and broader understanding of what constitutes a threat to international peace and security. This has involved discussions within the Council and resolutions referring to Chapter 7 of the UN Charter in relation to such a diverse range of issues as democracy restoration, refugee flows, humanitarian suffering, terrorism, HIV/AIDS, and climate change. As a consequence, SCRs authorizing action under Chapter 7 have become far more frequent. Whereas between 1946 and 1989 the UN invoked Chapter VII on 24 occasions, during the 1990s it did so in a further 166 resolutions. Importantly, since 1999, the Security Council has referred to Chapter 7 when devising mandates for peace support operations that involve the protection of civilians (see Section 2.3). In this sense, Chapter 7 can be used either to override state sovereignty, or to authorize peace operations that are deployed with the consent of the host government to engage in enforcement activities. The UN’s decision to authorize military force may be preventive, pre-emptive, or after the fact. Because the UN has no armed forces of its own, however, it has to delegate the authority to use force to other actors such as regional arrangements or a coalition of willing member states. This form of sub-contracting has the benefit of making large military operations more efficient and effective, but it has the drawback that the delegated actors may engage in actions that go beyond the stipulated mandate.

It is the UN’s roles in authorizing and conducting various types of peace operations that have attracted the most attention and scrutiny. The next two sections therefore provide an overview of the types of peace operations that have been undertaken and how the so-called Brahimi Report (2000) suggested they might be done better, and the development and impact of the “responsibility to protect”.

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