

INTRODUCTION

THE PARADOX OF INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

WHAT HAS BECOME OF MULTILATERALISM? For that matter, what has become of peacekeeping and humanitarian interventions? What has become of the ethics of international solidarity that they came to represent in the 1990s? And what chance do they have to obtain a significant role in the future? These are some of the questions around which this study revolves.

Obviously, part of the answer resides in the Bush administration's unabashed embrace of a unilateralist foreign policy and its focus on fighting terrorism. Quite apart from the kind of normative, gradual restoration of public security and representative government characteristic of so many peacekeeping operations launched in the 1990s, the current emphasis in international interventions is on direct threats to national security. In its preoccupation with "rogue" states, especially after 9/11, the Bush administration's preferred course has been pre-emption—to intervene before the state's actions become a "threat to the peace" and subject to drawn-out deliberations in the UN Security Council to get a murky mandate for intervention.¹ Iraq is the exemplar of this modality, and time will tell if it can be declared a "success."

As the United States has more or less retreated—or, perhaps, shifted priorities—from the multilateral management of "failed" states and humanitarian crises, where does this leave international politics and multilateral interventions in humanitarian crises and ethnic conflict? Do the changes in international affairs and of attitudes in the United States—the most powerful member of the UN Security Council—witness the eclipse of the kind of multilateral management of humanitarian crises and ethnic conflict that was characteristic of the immediate post-Cold War era? In other words, have the years of "robust" United Nations-mandated peacekeeping operations become a distant memory? Or can the management of intra- and

interstate conflicts stemming from “failed” states and their attendant pathologies in governance ever again enter the realm of UN-mandated multilateral peacekeeping?

To be sure, the Bush “revolution” in U.S. foreign policy and its underlying assumption that the kind of comprehensive peacekeeping pursued during the 1990s was a long, arduous, and complicated affair well outside the U.S. national interest militate to make multilateral peace operations a thing of the past. Yet there is another side to the story that points to the fact that “failed” states and the ethnic tensions often associated with them will continue to sprout across the globe.² Between 1991 and 2000, fifty-two armed conflicts broke out worldwide, of which thirty-five were internal and seventeen interstate in nature. By the mid-2000s, although the total number of conflicts had declined, the number of internal conflicts had increased to represent 95 percent of all conflicts worldwide.³ There is no reason to believe that this trend is likely to reverse in the years to come.

Thus the international community now stands at an ominous crossroads. Unless the international community and its principal powers are to ignore failing and failed states altogether, inevitably they will have to handle conflicts and humanitarian crises stemming from them. Future U.S. administrations and the international community at large may never return to the exact modalities of the 1990s, in which a UN mandate, at times in coordination with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or other regional organizations, seemed to be the order of the day in so many global hot spots—if only because the mixed results of the peacekeeping operations and missed opportunities of that era still resonate with many current and potential officials in the U.S. foreign policymaking establishment. But neither the United States nor the international community will be able to escape the need for peace operations. Costly they are, but not nearly as costly as unsuccessful unilateral interventions are to the international legitimacy of the United States and other relevant actors, be they states or international organizations. Peace operations are a necessity and a resource that should be used—now and in the future. Hence the imperative to assess the effectiveness of peace operations in light of past experiences and to learn what we can from them, so that understanding and clarity help prevent future mistakes; and there are no better case studies to analyze and learn from than the robust peace operations of the 1990s. Therein lies one of the main purposes of this work.

During the 1990s, the United Nations made significant efforts to respond to humanitarian crises and mass human rights violations. The number of peace operations and troops deployed; the amount of energy,

time, and money spent; and the scope of initiatives taken, from prevention to peace enforcement to peacebuilding, were the largest ever in the area of peacekeeping. Still, the end results were mixed. Peace operations certainly helped to protect the civilian populations in a number of instances and to alleviate their suffering. However, they neither prevented major humanitarian catastrophes from occurring nor kept wars from going almost unchecked for years. In this regard, the international community acting through the United Nations probably could have performed better and achieved more in Somalia and the Balkans, let alone in Rwanda and other parts of Africa.

How does one explain this paradox? Answering this question leads to more questions. How can we assess the role of the United Nations regarding humanitarian crises? What has been the impact of the structure of international politics—especially of the normative structure of international politics as epitomized in established principles of international law—on the ways the international community responded to humanitarian emergencies? How are we to understand the attitude of the key member states of the United Nations—the United States foremost among them—vis-à-vis multilateralism and the quest for a just international order?

Also, as mentioned earlier, considering the focus in recent years on terrorism and national security concerns, as well as the rift between the United Nations and the United States, a much more tangible and equally complex question arises: How can the lessons of the 1990s, in operational, political, and normative terms, contribute to making the peace operations of the future more efficient, not only to stop the mass carnage and dislocations in a “complex emergency” but also to ensure that the conditions contributing to the conflict-ridden humanitarian crisis do not return?

To unravel these vexing questions, this study takes three paths: descriptive, analytical, and prescriptive. It is descriptive in that it details the main peace operations launched throughout the 1990s, with special attention to the question of the use of force. Furthermore, the study depicts the role played by some of the key actors of the peace operations, accounting for the perspectives of the UN Secretariat, the UN secretary-general, and the permanent members of the Security Council—in particular, the United Kingdom, France, and, most important, the United States. Along the analytical path, this study searches for explanations that attempt to make sense of the “minimalist activism”—the combination of engagement and restraint—and of the ensuing mixed outcomes of the international community’s interventions. The study is prescriptive as it ultimately pursues ways to enhance a sense of international justice geared toward benefiting individuals and the

respect of their human rights as well as to achieve a genuine framework of collective security in the international realm.

With this descriptive, analytical, and prescriptive approach in mind, the study calls upon a number of ideas and notions that are used to draw an intellectual road map, including national interest, international legitimacy, international solidarity and its dilemmas, and international democratic culture.

National interest refers to the self-interest of nations, how states envision their defense and projection beyond their borders. Classically, national interest has been divided into those interests that states consider vital and those that relate to the promotion of subsidiary interests. Also, the notion of national interest has historically been associated with a geopolitical understanding of international relations because the pursuit of the national interest has been closely linked to geography: the locations where acts unfold (for economic, military, or other reasons) and that constitute potential fault lines that must be closely surveilled.⁴ Although this geographical anchoring remains significant, it is balanced by the changes brought about by the “de-territorialization” of politics at the national and international levels.⁵ Such de-territorialization (or, to use an equally nebulous term, globalization) includes normative factors such as the identification with human rights imperatives and the influence that it has on individual and collective interests and values and their interactions, as well as on policies at home and abroad.

International legitimacy is another theme of this work, and it is used in connection with the notion of the socialization of the international realm. At the most general level, the idea of legitimacy concerns first and foremost the authority to govern. As such, it tries to offer a solution to the fundamental problem of justifying power and obedience simultaneously.⁶ At the international level, legitimacy amounts to justifying the way international order is organized, including the ways power is projected beyond borders. Unless the norms called upon to justify international order and the projection of power beyond borders are perceived as good, the international system is likely to be seen as illegitimate. In contemporary terms, international legitimacy refers to the international rights and duties that actors (particularly states) have to factor in, not only to project acceptable foreign policies, but also to contribute to an international life that aims for the rule of law. As will be seen later in this study, in order to give a sense of overall legitimacy to their decisions and actions, as well as to the international system and its institutions (including the United Nations), decision makers in the international community (the UN Security Council mem-

bers in particular) must balance the values and rights expressed by various international norms and legal principles.

The criteria by which assessments are made of what is right and what is wrong internationally are largely a product of history. For example, the norms of legitimacy that are central to collective security are the result of a long but staggered cognitive evolution, most of which has occurred in the past fifty years and is destined to continue through unfolding events and the demands for UN action and multilateral responses to monitor and cope with them. This cognitive evolution is also influenced by the expectations—and thus the push for transformation—that the norms of legitimacy bring to the social reality of the international realm. The historical nature of norms and legitimacy at the international level must be kept in mind as we witness the unfolding of international events that challenge the conventional wisdom about collective security, as we wonder whether or not the established criteria of interpretation and judgment of what is right internationally should adjust to them, and as we wonder how and where to draw the line between what needs to remain the same and what needs to change in the analytical tools of evaluating international reality and in international reality itself.

“International solidarity” is an expression that conveys the need to help people beyond a nation’s own borders. Based on the internationalization of the democratic idea of human rights, it has a universalist character.⁷ The idea is that although human beings live in a plurality of cultures that exhibit a range of particular moral practices, all have basic needs and rights that must be respected. These basic needs and rights, which constitute the core commonality of individuals across the world, are also what bring these individuals together and impel them to identify with, and care about, the sufferings of others. At the international level, violations of these needs and rights call for a sense of solidarity beyond borders. Failing to respond to the plight of the other, failing to show solidarity, diminishes the humanity of all. As such, international solidarity points to the international community’s responsibility and obligation toward victims of conflict regardless of their personal circumstances and geographical location. And if an international humanitarian intervention in the form of a multilateral peace operation is the expression of an ethics of international solidarity, it must be primarily (although not exclusively) motivated by humanitarian reasons.

The notion of dilemmas of international solidarity helps to demonstrate that the international community’s handling of the crises in the 1990s, while responding to humanitarian impulses, did not amount to an idyllic picture of international solidarity. Particularly, the central place that

dilemmas occupied in the deliberations, decisions, and actions of the United Nations and its key members contributes to a contrasting account of the projection of solidarity at the international level. The dilemmas of ends and means, the weighing process, and the trade-offs that confronted the Security Council in the aftermath of the Cold War show dramatically the constraints that the “us-versus-them” divide imposes upon international solidarity. In the context of this study, this notion has to be understood in relation to the hybrid character of international life—the intertwined pulls of national interest and international solidarity—and its impact on international decision making and action.

The nature and relations of national interest, international solidarity, dilemmas of international solidarity, and international legitimacy lead to an unveiling of some of the critical aspects of contemporary “international democratic culture.” At first glance, it may appear incongruous for a study focusing on peace operations and humanitarian crises to make room for the idea of international democratic culture. Nonetheless, peace operations, especially those with a humanitarian-intervention motif, are a perfect venue for reviewing the extent and limits of contemporary international democratic culture in the aftermath of the Cold War. As peace operations were initiated primarily to re-establish order in a failed or failing state with special concern for the defense of the key tenets of democratic culture—universal human rights—they help assess how far international life is moving from a mainly Hobbesian vision of international relations, and how close it is getting to the notion of community and democratic empowerment.

The chapters of the study are organized along the following lines.

Chapter 1 analyzes the most salient initiatives taken by the United Nations to address humanitarian emergencies in the 1990s. It shows how UN peace operations embarked on daunting tasks, both quantitatively and qualitatively, in the ten years or so following the Cold War. Also, while acknowledging that the spectrum of measures encompassed in peace operations could not, immediately or in the long run, solve all problems, the chapter argues that their end results were disappointing.

The next three chapters explain the extent and limits—especially the limits—of international solidarity in the context of UN peace operations. They examine three factors that must be seen as having a *cumulative* effect in the shortcomings of the international community’s interventions.

Chapter 2 explores the limitations of the United Nations as an international organization, accounting for the difficulties of peace operations. Concentrating on some of the key operations—mainly Somalia, Bosnia,

and Rwanda—it looks into the negative impact of the political disagreement, on the one hand, between the UN secretary-general and the Security Council, and, on the other hand, among the members of the Security Council. In addition, the chapter analyzes the operational shortcomings of the United Nations when it comes to peacekeeping operations from the point of view of the UN Secretariat and the field.

Chapter 3 examines the political and normative structure of international life and how it opens possibilities but also creates constraints in the exercise and projection of international solidarity and responsibility. It argues that the norms of democratic solidarity that inhabit the United Nations and multilateralism embody a sense of international responsibility vis-à-vis the victims of massive human rights violations. Nevertheless, as international life is still structured around a national bias, the sense of international responsibility is hampered by an “us-versus-them” divide and its consequence (i.e., the primacy of national interest considerations over internationalist human rights concerns). This dual characteristic had a great impact in the context of humanitarian interventions and the use of force.

Chapter 4 analyzes the role of President Bill Clinton’s foreign policy in the multilateral handling of humanitarian emergencies. It stresses that the initial commitment of the Clinton administration to assertive multilateralism was short-lived and was quickly replaced by a rather erratic internationalist stance. In defense of Clinton’s foreign policy, one has to say that the weight of domestic politics, including congressional politics, and the reluctance of the U.S. military establishment to get involved in conflicts without a clear national interest context tempered the ways America took part—diplomatically, politically, and militarily—in peace operations.

The imperative of responding better to an ethics of international solidarity in light of the need for legitimacy in the international system could not have been challenged more dramatically than it has been since 2001, with the arrival of the Bush administration and its foreign policy mixture of selective multilateralism and unilateralism. September 11, 2001, deepened the conservative turn in U.S. foreign policy, particularly with the launch of Operation Iraqi Freedom in March 2003. What did these changes signify? Did they remove the experience with peace operations in the 1990s, the central issues and the lessons that can be drawn from that period, to a past disconnected from the post-9/11 world? To what extent is there continuity between the 1990s and the present in terms of multilateral interventions?

In truth, despite the difference between 1990s and now, current international life and the debates surrounding it are not entirely foreign to the

1990s. In fact, 9/11 and the Bush “revolution” in foreign policy gave a new centrality to one of the issues that had been at the center of peace operations in the 1990s—the use of force—its reasons and ways of implementing it. Starting in the middle of 2003, the Iraqi insurgency also served as a reminder of the familiar difficulty of achieving peace and security, let alone reconciliation and democracy, in a postconflict situation. More generally, the need to balance national and international interests, the tense relationship between the United States and the United Nations, the role of multilateralism as a conduit for international legitimacy, and the importance of the Atlantic Alliance have proved to be as important now as in the 1990s.

Chapter 5 addresses these issues and emphasizes that the Bush administration’s impact on multilateralism, peacekeeping, and humanitarian intervention was not a radical departure from mainstream U.S. foreign policy but, rather, pushed some of its core aspects to the edge. A disregard of multilateralism—its principles, institutions, and actions—led to the near collapse of the Atlantic Alliance and created a deep rift between the United States and the international community as a whole. In the process, the Bush administration also learned firsthand that it was not as easy as its most conservative elements had initially assumed to succeed on the ground and, more generally, to unilaterally define what constitutes a legitimate U.S. foreign policy, let alone international legitimacy.

The final chapter of this work argues that enhancing the sense of international solidarity, particularly as expressed in the context of peace operations and humanitarian interventions, calls for improving the United Nations as an institution. It also calls for normative and policy adjustments among national leaders—an important appeal, considering that international solidarity has a direct bearing on the establishment and preservation of international security. The chapter goes on to argue that the progressive dimension of international norms needs to be enhanced, especially by bringing to the fore the empowerment qualities (including the democratic empowerment qualities) of multilateralism. The connection between the inclusive aspects of multilateral politics and the United Nations, member states, regional organizations, and nongovernmental organizations has to be strengthened.

Even if significant progress is achieved in the area of international solidarity, it is unlikely that it will allow a complete break from the constraints identified in this study. At best, the tensions will be brought down to a more tolerable level. As alluded to in the afterword, the unresolved crisis in Darfur is only one indication of how the sense of international solidarity still has a long way to go to become more of a tangible reality. Neverthe-

less, the attempt to encourage internationalist values as much as possible, and thereby enhance an ethics of international solidarity, is essential for the legitimacy of the international system, as well as for any claim it may have to express and serve an international order inhabited and structured by concerns for justice.