Duada Abubakar

International Regional Action with regard to Conflicts in Multicultural Societies

(Work Sessions 8 and 20)

1. Introduction

The post-Cold War international system has been characterised by a resurgence of ethnic, religious, and identity-based conflicts that threaten not only the nation-state system, but also exacerbate regional instability, leading to humanitarian tragedies. Collapsed states such as Yugoslavia and Somalia clearly represent instances of failed states in which autocratic rule, deprivation and exclusion of minorities by privileged groups led to outbreak of political violence. The subsequent displacement of large segments of the population presented major challenges to the international community. These challenges included, first, the problem of ensuring safe delivery of humanitarian relief to the affected populace. Second, the mobilisation of international support and devising the conceptual/juridical framework for intervention to restore peace, and third, the formation of an interim civilian administrative machinery that could pave the way for a transition to a stable democratic order based on social justice, the rule of law, equity, transparency and accountability.

This chapter briefly synthesises the discussions on international and regional action with regard to conflict in multicultural societies held in Work Sessions 8 and 20 during the International Conference on Federalism 2002. The specific

562

cases examined in the two sessions included Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Somalia and East-Timor. Although these cases taken collectively illustrate instances of state collapse and international intervention under regional peacekeeping initiatives or multilateral efforts under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), closer examination of the crises reveals specific peculiarities in terms of ethno-religious pluralism, the relevance or otherwise of regional actors and the level of success in the restoration of peace and political stability.

2. International and regional action in the Balkans

The crises in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo erupted not only because of the disintegration of the Yugoslavian Republic but also because of perceived deprivation and marginalization by the various ethnic nationalities. Kosovar Albanians, for instance, were not only denied basic human rights by the Milosevic regime, but were constrained from exercising the right to self-determination (Caplan, 1998). In Bosnia and Herzegovina, internal violence and conflict arose as part of the generalised collapse of the Yugoslavian state. In both instances, there arose humanitarian tragedies that demanded international intervention to restore security, peace and stability. Peace initiatives by the European Union (EU) in the early 1990s, the Dayton Peace Accord of 1995, and subsequent deployment of UN peacekeeping troops restored stability in the Balkans.

Participants at Work Session 8, which covered the crises in the Balkans, made several key observations.

- Where humanitarian tragedies erupt as a result of state collapse, international intervention under the framework of the UN or regional initiatives is relevant for the restoration of peace, security and stability.

- The legitimacy of international intervention should be spelt out clearly in the mandate from the outset in order to avoid unnecessary confusion in the course of implementation. The UN should always be the forum for the legitimation of international intervention.

- It is imperative for the international community to establish an "Early Warning System" to avert humanitarian catastrophes. However, where such tragedies have erupted and peace is restored through collective intervention, it is also necessary to ensure that a "transitional administration" is put in place (see Kelly and McCormack, Part C). Institution building is imperative for the process of social and political reconstruction in the post-conflict phase.

- In the process of peace building, international action should ensure that the local community is not alienated, but rather actively involved, so that there is a collective sense of transparency, accountability and ownership.

- As part of the process of peace building and reconciliation, international action needs to ensure that rule of law prevails. Thus, the establishment of International Criminal Court is imperative as part of a holistic approach to international intervention in crises areas.

- The veto power in the Security Council, which privileges the five permanent members in the decision-making process, should be

reviewed as part of a comprehensive reform of the UN system. Democratising the UN system along the lines of majority rule would enhance the legitimacy of the world body and strengthen its capacity for international intervention and the restoration of peace and security.

3. Somalia: the limits of international intervention in collapsed states

If international intervention in the Balkans led to the cessation of warfare and the subsequent restoration of peace and stability, Somalia presents another side of international action, especially when the mandate of the multinational peacekeeping force is not well defined, and excessive military force is deployed to pursue political ends.

Somalia, a country with a population of approximately 9.2 million people is a plural society with diverse ethnic groups, and social identity that is built from diverse competing clans. In its search for foreign economic and military aid during the Cold War, Somalia was a client of both the former Soviet Union and later the United States. The influx of external financial resources not only provided the economic basis for the privatisation of state power, but also the context for patronage, corruption and internal struggles over access to wealth and power (Simons, 1996). With the cessation of the Cold War and the subsequent overthrow of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, Somalia, like Yugoslavia, became another victim of the end of the Cold War. The fall of Barre's autocracy meant an open political space for the warlords, and access to all kinds of light armaments hitherto used in the volatile Horn of Africa. As violence over the control of power erupted among warlords and their clans, a

humanitarian tragedy developed which provided justification for military intervention under the auspices of the UN. The United States was a key actor, contributing a large part of the intervention force in "Operation Restore Hope". However, confusion in the implementation of the peacekeeping mandate, coupled with excessive use of force by American troops to disarm clan warlords such as Farah Aideed culminated in the failure of the international action in Somalia. Other factors that contributed to the failure of the UN peacekeeping initiative in Somalia included:

- Lack of neutrality or impartiality of the intervening force;

- Lack of centralised coordination amongst the 37,000 troops drawn from 30 different countries;

- Over-dependence of the UN intervening force on the United States, which had its own national interests and agenda in the Horn of Africa, with Somalia being a strategic springboard;

- Warlords on the ground simultaneously pursuing their selfish group and clan interests, making the situation more complex, violent and destructive;

- Endless supplies of lethal armaments in local markets, within easy reach of the different factions, exacerbating the disintegration of the state and its institutions;

- Failure to observe international laws and respect for human rights: instead of protecting and defending the civilian populace from protracted factional conflict, the intervention force in Somalia engaged

in torture of civilians, thereby eroding the legitimacy of the whole mission;

- Failure to engage and carry on board local civil society groups and the citizenry in the peacekeeping and peace-building process leading to distrust and disenchantment on the part of the populace;

- Increasing absence of transparency, accountability, participation and ownership in the process de-legitimating the international intervention force in Somalia.

The Somalia experience suggests that there are important lessons to be learnt from international intervention in multicultural societies, especially where the state and its basic institutions of authority have completely collapsed. These lessons include:

- The objective(s) of an intervention force should always be clearly stated and defined in its mandate to avoid confusion in the process of implementation;

- There is need for UN to ensure the transparency, neutrality and objectivity of intervention force in terms of its composition, mission statement and deployment;

- The means must be proportional to the end: 37,000 troops from 30 different countries was certainly too large for Somalia;

- International intervention forces should endeavour to gain the support of the local civilian population not directly involved in the conflict.

4. East Timor: imperatives of international involvement

Although Somalia presents a case of total failure in international humanitarian intervention, East Timor demonstrates that the processes of rapid social change in plural societies and the attendant conflicts which they unleash in multicultural societies, makes international intervention in crisis areas very necessary. The role of the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) as well as the International Force in East Timor (INTERFET) contributed greatly to the restoration of peace, security and stability in the country. Although cases of human rights abuse were also reported along with marginalization of the citizenry in the peace-building process, the UN involvement in East Timor suggests that the international community should endeavour to strengthen the institutional and administrative frameworks of international peacekeeping missions. It is necessary, for example, to introduce a mechanism for monitoring and evaluating standards – human rights compliance, rule of law etc. – in peacekeeping missions. Some form of Ombudsman should be introduced to enhance accountability, equity and justice.

5. Conclusion

The cases presented on the crises in the Balkans, Somalia and East Timor all suggest that federalism as a mechanism for decentralisation and power sharing is relevant to conflict resolution in multicultural societies. While international intervention under the auspices of the UN could help in the restoration of peace and security where humanitarian tragedies occur, implementation of federal principles could avert the tragedies in the first place.

References

Caplan, R., 1998. International Diplomacy and the Crisis in Kosovo. *International Affairs,* 74 (4), 745-761.

Simons, A., 1996. Somalia: A Regional Security Dilemma. *In*: E.J. Keller and D. Rothchild, eds. *Africa in the New International Order: Rethinking State Sovereignty and Regional Security.* Boulder, Col: Lynne Rienner.