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Post-Lecture Discussion

SPEAKER: PETER WALLENSTEEN
MODERATOR: ROBERT C. JOHANSEN
SPEECH: "GLOBAL PATTERNS OF CONFLICT AND THE ROLE
OF THIRD PARTIES"
DATE: FEBRUARY 22, 1992

Professor Johansen: [Professor, Department of Government, University of Notre Dame.]

Thank you, Peter, for a very rich framework from which we can operate. We're going to go now to questions.

Participant: There is an issue you alluded to but didn't directly express an opinion on, and that is the issue of world policemen.

As you mentioned in the Cold War area, the U.S. and the Soviet Union, through their economic, military, and political power, were able to impose peace where they thought it was appropriate. Now, you mentioned that these two countries are both inward looking, and there's a whole bunch of new conflicts arising.

Do you see some other entity, for instance, the United Nations, taking on the role of world policeman, getting more economic and military power, say, in some place like Yugoslavia?

Professor Wallenstein: Yes. The Cold War was polarized along the left-right pattern and that it imposed that pattern on all kinds of conflicts, all of them were going to be treated in that way.

I think the record in actually solving conflict was rather poor. In fact, what happened during the Cold War was much more a freezing of conflicts. The wars were stopped where the armies stood. This divided countries along the thirty-eighth parallel or the seventeenth parallel. It was a way of managing the situation, but it was poor in terms of conflict resolution.

Coming more to your question, I think that there are now innovations going on in peace-keeping operations. One of the more intriguing, I think, is the special humanitarian effort in the Kurdish area which is not really a peace-keeping operation but a national rescue effort. It is composed of people from the U.N.

Secretariats and the guards in the U.N. Secretariat, that is international civil servants, not national units.

Another unique thing that occurred in 1991 is the peace-keeping operation on the Iraqi-Kuwaiti border which for the first time is an operation with military personnel from U.N. permanent members. Chinese and Russians are trying to supervise that particular border.

There is a lot of innovation going on in peace-keeping. How far will it go? I don't know. Will it really mean in the end that the Secretariat will become more of an independent factor, not so much dependent on what the big power says, but can move on its own?

The Secretary-General, if he is skillful, can develop more of a space to maneuver. I, of course, tend to think of Hammarskjold as a very successful Secretary-General in that respect. He managed to create such a room for maneuver. The attitude for a moment was, leave it to Dag, leave it to Dag Hammarskjold to solve things. I would like to see that kind of an atmosphere. Leave it to the U.N. Secretary-General. It can happen under certain circumstances. When it will happen, I'm not so sure. Things are definitely moving in that direction.

Participant: Staying on the United Nations for a second, when you talked about things in the future, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction—chemical, biological, other things, it seems to me that a lot of reasons that that would be a problem in the future is related to the United Nations.

It's related to the Security Council and the structure of it where a very clear message is given to developing states that you've got to have a weapon for mass destruction to be in the club and to be taken seriously.

Do you think that there will be any kind of movement in the future for re-evaluating the structure of the Security Council and, hopefully, trying to deal with the problems of proliferation of weapons for mass destruction by increasing political clout in developing countries within the United Nations?

Professor Wallensteen: Yes, there are two questions there. I think one is specifically on non-proliferation. The adherence to the NPTs has increased during the last year. A number of new countries actually joined this agreement including South Africa. North Korea might be coming in as well, and so on.

But I think what the Iraq experience tells us is that it's not enough that people sign the NPT. We need to have much more efficient inspection. And so you need to strengthen the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency.

About changing the Security Council, it seems to be inevitable that it has to be changed and that it becomes increasingly impossible to have a situation where five members can have a veto and the others don't. How it is going to be solved, I don't know. There are many proposals about it. But if these trends continue, as I suggested here—and the U.N. January 1, 1991, had 162 members. Now, it's probably 180. And it is reasonable to assume in the next couple of years it will be 200. Then it becomes even more difficult to have only five commanding solid influence.

So, it is inevitable that this is going to change. My hope is that the veto right would become obsolete. I think now it also requires a reform. The U.N. will be fifty years old in 1995. That's an opportunity when one could present new reports with new ideas about reforming the U.N., and making it more representative but also more efficient.

Participant: In your closing comments you talked about how frameworks—analytical frameworks—can show us some things that we close our eyes to and ignore. I have one comment, one question in that regard.

Looking backward, your definition of conflict, especially clearly in conflicts over states, includes the goals of the warring parties in the definition of conflict. In American political science that was very frowned upon. They were extremely careful to exclude the goals of the warring parties from their definition. As a result, I think they will miss the trend. Their data will not show—as it becomes updated, it will not show the trend which you identify of more of these types of conflicts because they are defined as internal. Looking to the future, on the other hand, your definition still requires that a state be one of the major actors. How does that apply to Somalia where there's no—none of the actors seem to be a state. How is Somalia coded?

Professor Wallensteen: Well, it is coded. It is defined as a state, but we don't really know who is in control of it. There are some differences in their design. Most important is that we also pick up those conflicts which have less than one thousand deaths.

They have also taken in something called serious disputes between states. That, I think, helps. Then you can see a little more of the complexity of the word.

Professor O'Neill: [Onora O'Neill, Principal of Newnham College, Cambridge University.]

I greatly enjoyed your analysis, but you seem to say very little about the Third World, and I can see why. But it does seem to be a question when will there be any effective parties who are interested in the resolution of the conflicts in the poorest areas of the world except insofar as it bears on the political proliferation goals of those more powerful nations.

Professor Wallensteen: I think you are absolutely right that there is a focus on Europe getting civilized, building up the European community. The East Bloc is disappearing, we don't know if it will be chaotic or not.

What the statistics say is that most of the wars in the Third World are internal. Also, there is some kind of malaise in interest. Well, we forgot about Africans. We don't care. I think there is a real danger there.

I think, first of all, that the situation is not that bad. Many quite interesting things are happening in the Third World. There is development also. There is some innovation. To me, the way the new government in Ethiopia is trying to handle the post-war situation is a very interesting experiment. Where they're actually doing a re-drawing of maps and saying, well, we will identify that later and groups will identify themselves and say which territories they want. We will draw new provincial boundaries, which means that each group will have its own territory, more or less. We'll see how it works out.

On the whole, the First World is becoming less and less concerned about it, partly because much of the previous concern had to do with nuclear weapons and the Cold War. The West was battling communism and if they were communists the West became suddenly interested. I don't think they were totally communist before, and the West should be interested anyway.

Professor Fisher: [Roger Fisher, Williston Professor of Law, Harvard Law School.]

I was also impressed with your framework and with your last comment.

Your starting with the armed conflict and the concept of resolution indicates there's a particular battle taking place and you want to end the battle. You looked to the future, and the issues which you have illuminated for us, not only environmental but minorities, human rights, justice, and poverty, those are not problems that ever get resolved.

I think you really want the training exercise. It seems to me that the training which is needed must include the skills for dealing with conflicts of interest based on endless differences.

Proliferation is not a problem that is going to be resolved. It's going to be endless. If you think resolving it by a written agreement or accord will solve that problem, sign the treaty. The notion of the legalistic view of drawing up a piece of paper and solving these conflicts puts us in the wrong direction. We're going to need people who can deal with human rights problems, with minorities. There will always be minorities. The world population does not lend itself to separating people.

So, we're dealing with conflicting interests. Training participants to deal with endless sets of resolving differences. I think we can focus on the modeling of armed conflict and resolving it without getting the full benefit of your framework. That's not what the issues are going to be. The issues are going to be different, ill-formed groups deriving all the time and asserting collectively their interests against the majority.

We have to be moving toward not just having a third party come in, solve the conflict, and leave, but teaching the participants themselves to deal with tomorrow's problem and the next one and the next one.

Professor Wallensteen: I agree completely. The term resolution, I didn't define. I didn't define third party, either. So, the more immediate definition of resolution is that the groups accept each other and accept the differences and find some ways of living together and doing it constructively and living constructively together. That would be developing rules of resolution in some sense. That would be the sort of intermediate definition of resolution.

One of the biases in our thinking is that we propose or suggest that the states should at all times be preserved. If the state, for instance, is creating the problem, maybe a good decent relationship between two ethnic groups can be made if the state is divided.

I would use a sort of chauvinistic example. Sweden and Norway were one union clearly dominated by Sweden. The Norwegians complained about Swedish colonialism and demanded independence. In the end, they declared themselves independent.

Sweden faced the question whether to intervene, occupy the country, and preserve the Swedish empire. There were strong forces in that direction. There were also popular organizations against such a course, that is labor and peace movements.

In the end there was no fight. Sweden accepted Norway's independence in the hope of building a constructive relationship after independence. Actually, a demilitarized zone was established between Sweden and Norway. That was a way of solving conflict. Basically, it meant drawing a line. Ultimately, it created a good working relationship for the future.

Participant: Yesterday, George Lopez made a very good argument about the role of the non-governmental organization in resolving future conflicts. Now, you haven't included them in your model. But I'm wondering what you think of these non-participatory, non-governmental organizations and their role in shaping and resolving some of these conflicts that you mentioned as part of our future.

Professor Wallenstein: They were in there, but I don't think I mentioned them. They are part of the new organizations. They are very important. They could be quite effective in various stages.

One stage is defining the dispute. The normal thing is that one side will say this is a conflict; the other says it's boundaries. They have to break through that and say the legitimate thing involved is the important thing, to start the resolution process.

They can help in building confidence between the parties so that they can talk about the conflict. And, again, I think these organizations can be important. They can be important in mediating. Even the universities can do that. Let me make a final remark because Professor Fisher's mentioned education. I think it is very important.

Most people come with the idea that conflicts are somehow natural, a given, or inevitable. Then this is formed in their mind, that you can't really do anything about it. Suddenly, you can start to see cases of resolution, hear about proposals and learn about mediations. It helps to enlarge the possibilities of the world.

I don't think that we can move every conflict to resolution through education, but it suggests that ideas and thinking can be influenced. That is the task of education. That's why it is important that any progressive university has a center for peace studies.

Professor Johansen: I feel a victim of a different framework, namely, the time. I want to thank you, Peter, very much for this presentation and thank the audience for your participation.

