

Leadership in Crisis Situations

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The basis of the international system is still the nation-state. During the last fifty years decolonization divided the entire world into nation-states, and the UN Charter enshrined the juridical norm of sovereign equality and the rule against intervention in matters essentially within their domestic jurisdiction. At the same time states have accepted restrictions on their freedom of action to achieve shared goals and to preserve order within the system. Whether through cooperation or conflict, states pursue their interests. For a diplomat the term “crisis situation” evokes conflicts between states.

Today’s typical crisis is the failure of the state to perform basic functions: providing for the security and welfare of all its citizens and managing relations with its neighbors. As a state breaks apart into warlord fiefdoms, the basis for the rules of sovereign equality and non-intervention disappears. The spread of chaos damages the security interests of other states. Refugees, trade disruptions, arms flows, brigandage, and drug trafficking: what starts out as an internal conflict becomes a regional threat.

Leadership means showing how to get there from here. It has three elements. First, there must be a capacity, the resources, to do the job. Second, will is needed, and among states the surest source of will is the perception that important interests are at stake. Third, a leader needs a vision, not “the vision thing” but the ability to guide the way forward from a crisis to a solution. Leadership for today’s crisis situations is in deficit in all three ingredients: capacity, will, and vision.

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WHICH CRISIS SITUATIONS?

The pattern for the crises ahead seems set - conflicts within the borders of individual states, having limited international causes but growing impacts neighboring states, causing enormous human suffering.

The Security Council's active agenda lists the current crises affecting international peace and security. Twenty years ago the Council only discussed conflicts in the Middle East and in Southern Africa, but now the docket is full: El Salvador and Haiti; the Former Yugoslavia; Abkhazia and Nagorno-Karabakh; Afghanistan and Tajikistan; Cambodia, North Korea; Iraq; Cyprus; the Arab-Israeli conflict; and then Africa - Sudan, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, Zaire, Angola, Liberia, Western Sahara, Libya, and the conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon. All of these crises are caused by sick states.

A comparative list of crisis situations appeared in a recent U.S. government study entitled *Global Humanitarian Emergencies, 1996*. It defined humanitarian emergencies as situations in which large numbers of people depend on humanitarian assistance from sources external to their own society or on physical protection to have access to subsistence. While the details in the report are open to debate, the major trends are undeniable:

- in the last ten years the number of people in need of assistance has increased 60 percent, reaching a plateau of 40-45 million;

- internally displaced persons (22-24 million) now greatly outnumber refugees (16 million);

- most emergencies are manmade, and the number of such emergencies in 1994 was five times the average for the period 1985-1989;

- most such emergencies take place in developing countries, which now must include new states in the Balkans, the Caucasus, and Central Asia;

- the 23 crises described in the study are essentially internal conflicts; all have some international consequences, but not one can be characterized as essentially an inter-state conflict.

What relationship does this list have to the Security Council agenda? Last year the Security Council discussed all of these crises areas except for Sri Lanka and Chechnya. Only five conflicts on its agenda escape the list - the peace-keeping operations in Cyprus, Lebanon, Macedonia, Syria, and the Western Sahara. Arguably none of these are now crisis situations.

To the extent that the present is a guide for the future, upcoming crisis situations will have several characteristics:

- The most frequent crisis situations will be internal conflicts that produce humanitarian emergencies on a scale that threatens neighboring countries.

- Most of these conflicts have no immediate, substantial impact upon the interests of the great powers.

- The international response to such crises will rarely be decisive.

CAPACITY

The crisis level is up, but the resource level is down. I would like to cite three trends: in the level of resources that the U.S. provides for the civilian instruments of its foreign policy; in the resources available for military interventions by the international community; and, in the level of international funding for emergency humanitarian assistance.

First, the U.S. account for civilian international programs. In January Secretary Christopher told a Harvard audience that forces in Congress would cut the foreign affairs budget so deeply that the U.S. "would have to draw back from our leadership." In fact much cutting had already been done. Funding for the State Department, economic assistance, peace-keeping, and assessments to international organizations has declined since 1984 from \$37.5 billion (in 1996 dollars) to \$18.6 today. These cuts hamper the U.S. ability to lead, and, by limiting funding for international organizations, they restrict the capacity of states to act through multilateral institutions. Either way, needs go unmet.

Second, military resources for emergency interventions. Today's crises take place in faraway, primitive, hostile locations. What does it take to project power there? Advanced transport and communications; a logistics system able to sustain force without local supplies; disciplined, trained troops; and, command and control for a multinational operation. In addition to the United States, among NATO members only Britain and France have such a capability, and their intervention forces are 10,000 each. The Russian military is straining at tasks close to home; the German and Japanese constitutions bar such actions; and, no other state has this capacity.

Without Britain, France, or the United States taking the lead, can emergency interventions be conducted? India put a peace-keeping force in Sri Lanka, and Nigeria leads in Liberia a force composed of troops from neighboring states. The United Nations, if it has support from Britain, France, and the U.S., can put a force into a non-hostile environment. Of course the primary task of the British, French, and U.S. military is to protect vital national interests and to prevail in battle, not to lead emergency interventions. When these three states decide not to participate, the international community lacks the means to intervene.

Third, international funding for emergency humanitarian assistance. In the last ten years both the needs and contributions have multiplied, but now funding is on the decline. In 1994 donor government provided \$2.2 billion of the \$2.8 billion requested in UN consolidated appeals; last year the level down to \$1.8 billion of the \$2.5 billion requested. This year, even if funding levels remain constant, food prices are rising. The U.S. Department of Agriculture predicts that this year that 16.5 million metric tons of food will be needed to meet both chronic food deficits and emergency food needs, but the Food and Agriculture Organization warns that only 7.6 million tons of food aid will be available. Parts of Africa expect poor crops, and the prospects are grim.

WILL

States act based on perceived interests. During the Cold War the United States perceived that it had interests at stake wherever the Soviet Union might be able to gain influence, and it was ready to react everywhere. No longer, as the decline in resources testifies. When President Bush acted in the name of a New World Order, he was using resources provided for the Cold War and which are no longer so readily available. Washington now sees important U.S. interests to be concentrated in fewer areas.

This February a White House report identified situations in which the President would commit U.S. forces:

-when vital interests are involved, the U.S. would respond unilaterally when it must and with allies when possible. Such vital interests include protection of U.S. citizens and territory, the territory of allies, and vital economic interests. A recent example is the U.S. reaction to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait.

-when important interests are involved, the U.S. would respond only when the response was commensurate with the risks, when it was deemed likely to succeed, and the commitment was limited. Such intervention would normally not be unilateral. Deployments of U.S. forces to Haiti and Bosnia are examples.

-when a humanitarian emergency occurs, the U.S. would normally not commit its own forces. In such cases it would act only in conjunction with other states, and its role would be limited to areas where it can make a unique contribution, such as jump starting the operation with logistics, transport, and communications support. U.S. troops would normally not have a ground role. The U.S. military response to the crisis in Rwanda in 1994 would be an example; airlifting food to Bosnia would be another.

After the global competition with the Soviet Union ended, vital interest seem to be located on U.S. territory, in Western Europe, in Northeast Asia, and in the Persian Gulf. In areas such as the Caribbean or the Balkans, where important but not vital interests are involved, the U.S. is prepared to lead first with an active diplomacy: to assess the risks of neglect or engagement, to improve the odds of success, and to secure partners; intervention as part of a coalition might then follow. In most crisis situations today the U.S. claims no leading role and U.S. participation depends on cooperation with others to share the burdens and decision-making. How ready are others to act?

Not ready. West African states now threaten to end their peace-keeping operation in Liberia unless the local warlords respect a cease-fire. The Secretary-General asked 64 states if they were willing to provide a battalion to assist in demilitarizing the camps of Rwandan refugees in Zaire; 63 said no. France will not provide troops to assist with any operation in Burundi, claiming negative reaction in the region to Operation Turquoise, through which France helped stabilize the flight of refugees from Rwanda in 1994. Spurred on by setbacks in Somalia and the Former Yugoslavia, UN peacekeeping has dropped from 78,000 troops two years ago to 27,000 today.

The urge to join in a military intervention, let alone to lead it, is weak. Few are the crises today likely to generate either unilateral action by the United States or its determination to forge a coalition ready to act together. And without such determination by a few leading states, especially the United States, UN peacekeeping is unlikely.

VISION

We have only dimly seen the way to move from crisis situations to solutions.

The approaches taken have been experimental, and the results have not been encouraging.

Diplomats have a range of methods for promoting the national interest in managing relations between equally sovereign states. We now put these methods to use for a different purpose: to prevent the outbreak or continuation of internal conflicts. One key impediment has been that a recognized government and an insurgency are not equals in status, and in fact the entire conflict can turn on the issue of relative status. Higher level diplomatic involvement accentuates this impediment and often complicates efforts to launch a dialogue. In addition, the rule against intervention in matters essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of states guarantees that such action is always criticized. Few such interventions have led to reconciliation among the parties.

Military interventions involving the use of force have taken two approaches. First, when the authority to use force is vested in a national command guided by vital or important national interest: Operation Desert Storm, the initial U.S.-led operation in Haiti, and IFOR were organized as multi-national forces enjoying explicit Security Council authority to use all necessary means to accomplish stated objectives. Second, when the authority to use force is vested in a UN command - an attempt to separate decision-making authority, command and control from the national interests of the states contributing to the force:

- during the second stage of the UN's Somalia operation, U.S. forces attempted to arrest General Aideed. U.S. spokesman, not citing any vital U.S. interest, presented this as a UN operation. When the attempt backfired and 18 U.S. servicemen died, public support for any U.S. role unraveled.

- the UN force sent to Rwanda to help implement a cease-fire did not have the mission or capacity to use force when the situation deteriorated in April 1994. Nevertheless, Belgian authorities have court-martialled the commander who failed to use force to liberate Belgian soldiers being held as hostages.

- UNPROFOR almost never used force to carry out its mandate, nor did its British and French commanders authorize sustained use of NATO air-power until after the

fall of Srebrenica. When NATO member states agreed last July on the use of air-power, the commanders soon authorized its use.

After five years of experimentation it is time to reaffirm Dag Hammarskjold's advice: UN forces cannot perform mandates that require the initiative in the use of force.

WHAT TO DO?

Failures diminish the will to intervene and the level of resources available. The best way to improve the odds for success is to get the politics of intervention right before launching an operation. Know the purpose of the intervention and insist that the necessary means are available. When there is no important national interest at stake and when the operation seems hazardous, non-intervention may be the wisest policy.

Here are five guidelines for leadership in today's crisis situations:

1. Leave space for other actors: When the origin of the crisis is not a conflict between states, non-state actors may have essential roles to play in initial contacts between the parties, in convening a dialogue, in sustaining a political process, and in helping to ameliorate the internal consequences of the conflict.

2. Seek dialogue as a basis for international action: When the parties can agree on a process for managing their conflict, the international community has a legitimate basis for a broad range of activities to support their agreement: human rights monitors, cease-fire observers, election assistance, monitoring and training of police, demining, and help with demobilizing contending forces and forming a national defense force.

3. Preserve international norms: Here the international community should act together in the community interest. Certain regimes are a basis for international action even in the absence of agreement by the parties, and they should be respected: the laws of war, international human rights, prohibition on the use of certain weapons, laws regarding treatment of prisoners and refugees, and other specific actions sanctioned by the Security Council, such as Operation Provide Comfort in northern Iraq or the embargo against sale of arms to Liberia.

4. Provide an international framework for specific interventions by regional actors: Oversight arrangements are needed to make the legitimacy of such action conditional on international standards – examples are the UN observer missions that have tracked the CIS operations in Tajikistan and Georgia, the ECOMOG operation in Liberia, and the U.S.-led multinational force in Haiti.

5. Leave the authority for the use of force to national forces: This responsibility cannot be successfully delegated to an international organization. Those who oppose the easy recourse to force should welcome this restriction.