"The New World Order": An Outline of the Post-Cold War Era

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Abstract

This article provides an analytical discussion on post-Cold War developments and the emerging world order in that era. In this regard, some of the main characteristics of the international system, basic trends, and new threats in international relations are addressed, in that order. It is argued that while classical inter-state wars tend to decrease in the post-Cold War era, there are many other serious threats to international peace beyond the full control of nation-states, most notably ethnic conflicts, religious militancy, terrorism, North-South conflict, and unfair economic competition. The future of the world is stressed to depend on whether major powers are able to, and willing to, work on these threats in a cooperative manner.

Key words: Post-Cold War Era, International System, International Trends, International Threats, World Order.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s has had a dual impact on international relations. On the one hand, the Soviet military withdrawal from Eastern Europe and the Third World brought an end to the Cold War, allowed democratization to proceed in many states previously ruled by Marxist dictatorships, and led to significant progress in resolving several Third World conflicts that had become prolonged during the Cold War. The reduction in East-West tension also resulted in a great decrease in inter-state conflicts, some of which occurred due to the superpower ideological rivalry during the Cold War. Even it became fashionable to argue that force, used here as military power, has run its course in international politics. And it is true that defense budgets in many parts of the world radically decreased (See, for example, United States, Government Accountability Office, 2008). This trend, despite very few contrary examples (for instance China), appears to holding.

On the other hand, however, it would be rather unwise to argue that the world is now at peace. The collapse of the "Soviet Empire" was followed by the emergence, or re-emergence, of many serious conflicts in several areas that had been relatively quiescent during the Cold War. Some of these new conflicts have been taking place within the former Soviet Union, such as the war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, and the fighting in Chechnya. But some conflicts also erupted or intensified in several countries outside of it and many Third World conflicts in which the superpowers were not deeply involved during the Cold War have persisted after it, like the secessionist movements in India, Sri Lanka, and Sudan.

Ethnopolitical conflicts aside, there have been other threats to international order that are, indeed, beyond the full control of major powers, even the United States, the victor of the Cold War. The most notable ones include religious militancy, terrorism, North-South conflict, and severe competition over scarce resources. Thus, the end of the Cold War can be said to have brought about both stability and instability to international relations. The purpose of this article is to evaluate nearly two decades of the post-Cold War era in terms of the elements of stability and instability. In this respect, the study will start with an overview of the general characteristics of the international system. This will be followed by a more detailed discussion on basic trends and new threats in international relations. Several observations will also be outlined in concluding the study with respect to possible future directions of international affairs.

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM AFTER THE COLD WAR

With the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe and disintegration of the Soviet Union, the bipolar international system dominating the Cold War period disappeared, leaving its place to basically a unipolar system under the leadership of the United States, speaking especially from a military/political point of view. The former rivals of the United States, especially the Soviet Union and China, have either collapsed or jettisoned the central features of their ideologies that were hostile to the United States. Other countries have turned to American military protection. The "American Empire" may best be seen operating in the Persian Gulf, Iraq, and the Middle East, in general, where the armed forces of the United States have established a semi permanent foothold and thousands of soldiers deployed at bases keep a watch on Iran, Syria, and other "potential enemies".

Albeit widely criticized, American military power serves a number of critical functions. In some areas, in the Persian Gulf for example, it guarantees weak states against attacks by their

stronger neighbors. In Asia, the presence of the United States stabilizes the region in which a number of states might otherwise feel compelled to develop much larger military forces than they currently have. American military power in Japan does only protect Japan against foreign enemies. It indirectly protects China and other Asian states against the consequences that might flow from a heavily re-armed Japan. Moreover, American military power serves as an organizer of military coalition, both permanent (such as NATO) and *ad hoc* (such as peacekeeping missions). American military participation is often necessary to the command and control of coalition operations. When the Americans are willing to lead, other countries often follow, even if reluctantly. However, these are certainly not to argue that American interventions occur in every large conflict around the world. But it means that almost any country embarking on the use of force beyond its borders has to think about possible reactions of the United States (See, Sanders, 2008).

From an economic/political point of view, on the other hand, the international system can be said to be multipolar, rather than unipolar. The United States certainly a great economic power, but it is not the only power. There are other power centers, most notably, the European Union, the Organization of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, as well as many nation-states outside of these integrations or organizations (See, Harrison, 2004). As a matter of fact, when the United States exercised military operations to "stable" the world in Kuwait, Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, it insisted on sharing the costs of the operations with other major powers or relevant countries. Thus, the international system of the post-Cold War era actually reflects a mixture of both unipolar and multipolar system in which at least five major powers, the United States, Europe, China, Japan, and Russia, dominate international affairs.

BASIC TRENDS IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

The general wish of the dominant powers in the post-Cold War era is to preserve the status quo from which they mostly benefit. Hence, international cooperation evidently increased among major powers, as exemplified by the increase of peace operations. To be more specific, while from 1948 to 1978, only a total of 13 peacekeeping forces were set up, and in the following ten-year period, no new forces were established, from May 1988 to October 1993, a further twenty forces were created. As of December 2008, the number of UN peacekeeping operations has reached 63, 18 of which are still operating in the field, involving 112660 military personnel and civilian police.[1]

The decreasing ideological clashes between the United States and Russia manifested itself most clearly in the decline of the veto at the Security Council. From 1945 to 1990, the

permanent members of the Security Council cast the following number of vetoes: China, 3; France, 18; United Kingdom, 30; US, 69; and the Soviet Union, 114. Then between June 1990 and May 1993, there was no single veto. One exception occurred in May 1993 when Russia blocked a resolution on financing the peacekeeping force on Cyprus. With this exception, the post-Cold War capacity of the Security Council to reach agreement has survived and constituted a key reason for the increase in the number of peacekeeping operations (See, Yılmaz, 2005).

Another feature of the post-Cold War era is that since the West has become the victor of the East-West ideological rivalry, Western systems and Western influences, in general, started to dominate the whole world. For example, the United States has visibly enhanced its influence in the Middle East and in Caucasus since the end of the Cold War. The invasion of Kuwait by Iraq in August 1990 and the following Gulf Crisis, in a way, created an opportunity for the Unites States to exercise its hegemonic power in the Middle East. In the following years, in the absence of a counter-power, the influence of the United States increased further. With the military operation to Afghanistan and invasion of Iraq after the September 11, 2001 attacks, the United States perpetuated its dominance in the region.

The region of Caucasus was formerly under the Russian sphere of influence. But the United States managed to enter this energy-rich region with some new allies, used to be the part of the Soviet Union, such as Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Georgia. Although Russia certainly did not want the United States presence in the region, its ability to prevent it has remained limited.

Likewise, NATO expanded to involve Eastern Europe, a region also used to be under Soviet influence. Russia, in the beginning, tried to resist NATO expansion, posing several threats, including creating a counter defense organization. But it was eventually convinced with the project of "partnership for peace", through which it preserved many of its privileges in Eastern European countries (See, US Department of State, 1996).

In the same way, the European Union expanded towards Eastern Europe, symbolizing, once again, Western dominance. Particularly with the 2004 expansion, eight formerly-communist countries, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Check Republic (with the exception of Cyprus and Malta) joined the Union. And in 2007, two other previously-communist states, Bulgaria and Romania, became full members as well.

While all these dictate Western dominance in the post-Cold War era, the effects of this dominance have manifested itself in the world as both stability and instability. On the one hand, the hegemonic power of the United States and expansion of Western-originated

organizations have an impact on decreasing international anarchy and thus, increasing international stability. On the other hand, however, growing Western dominance brought about many reactions and challenges towards the West. It seems that most of the reactions take place in the Islamic world as if it proves Samuel P. Huntington's famous "clash of civilizations" thesis (See, Huntington, 1997). However, such reactions currently appear to be disorganized, less powerful, and thus they are far away from posing a serious challenge to Western dominance. But nonetheless, anti-Westernism in the Muslim world and elsewhere seems particularly to feed terrorism, a serious threat to peace in the post-Cold War period, as it will be discussed below.

NEW THREATS

Although the ending of the Cold War clearly increased the willingness of governments to work through the United Nations and other international channels to resolve conflicts and keep peace around the globe, several new threats have emerged in the post-Cold War era that are, indeed, beyond the full control of nation-states, even major powers. One of the greatest threats, in this regard, is the prevalence of intra-national conflicts, conflicts occurring within the borders of states. These are mostly ethnically-driven conflicts over self-determination, succession or political dominance. Until the end of the Cold War, the conventional wisdom in the world was that ethnicity and nationalism were outdated concepts and largely resolved problems. On both sides of the Cold War, the trend seemed to indicate that the world was moving toward internationalism rather than nationalism. As a result of the threat of nuclear warfare, great emphasis on democracy and human rights, economic interdependence, and gradual acceptance of universal ideologies, it became fashionable to speak of the demise of ethnic and nationalist movements.

Despite contrary expectations, however, a fresh cycle of ethnopolitical movements have re-emerged recently in Eastern Europe (including the Balkans), Central Asia, Africa, and many other parts of the world. While wars fought among sovereign countries are increasingly the exception to the norm, intra-national conflicts have account for over 90 percent of the major armed conflicts recorded in recent years worldwide.[2] This trend appears to be holding.

Yet the international community cannot be said to have well prepared to this trend. Major international organizations, including the United Nations, were designed to cope with inter-state problems, historically the main source of threat to global peace and security. Besides, the fact that internal conflicts occur within the borders of states made major international actors reluctant to intervene, either for legal concerns or for concern to avoid

probable loses. For example, during Clinton administration, the United States government issued PDD-25 (Presidential Decision Directive-25), limiting the conditions that the United States can participate in United Nations peacekeeping operations. (See, the Clinton Administration's Policy on Reforming Multilateral Peace Operations, 1994). In short, unless they really escalate, the international community has preferred not to involve in intra-national conflicts.

But such conflicts could be as serious, costly, and intense as any in the past. And somehow they need to be resolved, or else international peace and security will not be in a stable situation. Although intra-state conflicts appear to be local, they can quickly gain an international dimension due to global interdependence and to various international supports. In fact, when external parties provide political, economic, or military assistance, or asylum and bases for actors involved in local struggles, these conflicts inevitably assume an international dimension (See, Yılmaz, 2007).

Undoubtedly, effective management of intra-state conflicts requires an understanding of the root causes of these conflicts, as well as application of proper strategies for stopping violence and building peace. By far, the international community has been relatively successful in deploying peacekeeping forces in violent internal conflicts, whereby such conflicts were tried to be controlled. As mentioned above, 50 peace operations were realized in the post-Cold War era, 18 of which are still on duty. And, generally speaking, thousands of civilian and military peacekeepers have been successful in keeping people alive and in preventing conflict escalation. However, it has not been well understood that United Nations peacekeeping is a "palliative", not a cure. Peacekeeping forces do not directly resolve conflicts. That is not their purpose. All they can do is to manage the conflict for a period of time to allow the people who can resolve it to negotiate a resolution of their differences in an atmosphere not poisoned by death and destruction. More problematic is the idea of expanded peacekeeping which leads to the militarization of peacekeeping. Rather than turn to increasingly militarized solutions -a habit that pervades thinking about conflict management at the international level- non-violent alternatives, which take account of the range of complex issues involved in violent conflicts and the people who experience them, should be considered. Hence, what is actually needed in intra-state conflicts is proper peace building efforts that complement peacekeeping. Although since the end of the Cold War, United Nations peacekeeping operations have evolved to involve many peace building activities (such as monitoring, even running local elections, assisting in the reconstruction of state

functions, and so on- See, Serafino, 2005; Daniel et al, 2008), the ability of the international community, nevertheless, has still remained limited, in this respect.

Another threat to peace in the post-Cold War period is rising religious militancy. To some extent, it seems that religiously-driven conflicts have replaced the ideological zone of the Cold War as a serious source of international conflict. Some analysts even contended that it is now cultural rather than "iron" curtains that divide the world, and that religion fuels the conflict in a special way by inspiring intolerant and irreconcilable images of identity and commitment among competing civilizations. Even more than ethnicity, Huntington argues, religion discriminates sharply and exclusively among people …As people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an "us" versus "them" relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity and religion (Huntington 1993, 40, 45).

Although Huntington's thesis is a provocative one, in its support, one can point to governments in countries like Iran, Sudan, and to Islamic movements throughout the Middle East and elsewhere, which readily resort to the language of cultural confrontation. In many of these places, a spirit of religious militancy, at times called "religious fundamentalism", prevails. It often includes support for violence against the manifestation of sacrilege and oppression seen to be imposed upon Muslim peoples by the West or its sympathizers.

Though relations between Asia and the West have not been expressed in such violent terms, "civilizational tension" is frequently reported, nevertheless. Most of the Asian countries are now less inclined than they once were to acquiesce to Western cultural preference, as, for instance, in the interpretation of rights or the development of certain political and social institutions.

Many religious militants are strongly committed to the direct use of violence in pursuing their mission. There have been numerous widely publicized examples, such as the massacre by a Jewish zealot of two dozen Muslim worshippers in Hebron, the explicit blessing of violence by both Serbian Orthodox and Croatian Catholic Christians in the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, the September 11 attacks on the United States, and the July 2005 bombings of the London subway in which so many innocent people became victims.

Religiously-driven violent intolerance can also be connected to terrorism in many cases. In fact, some of the world's most dangerous terrorist organizations today, like *Islamic Jihad* and *El-Kaida*, are ideologically fed by religious fundamentalism. Most people in such organizations strongly believe that direct use of violence in the name of religion is obligatory. They are also convinced that if they die in their "holy struggle", they will be rewarded in the

next life; they will directly go to heaven. This belief removes fear or guilt feeling, making killing and dying much easier consequently (See, Yılmaz, 2002).

Terrorism, whether it is fed by religious fundamentalism or not, is another serious threat to peace in the post-Cold War era. While occasional terrorist activities have been part of human history, terrorism particularly became a serious problem after the end of the Cold War, especially after the September 11 attacks.

The term terrorism has been described variously as both a tactic, a reaction to oppression, and a crime. Obviously, the description depends on whose point of view is being represented. The Unites States Department of Defense defines terrorism as "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological. Outside the United States, there are greater variations in what features of terrorism are emphasized in definitions. The United Nations, for instance, defined terrorism as "an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal or political reasons, where -in contrast to assassination- the direct targets of violence are not the main targets".[3]

But it should be noted that the phrase "one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" is a view terrorists themselves would accept. Terrorists do not see themselves as evil. They believe they are legitimate combatants, fighting for what they believe in, by whatever means possible (See, Martin, 2006). On the other hand, a victim of a terrorist act sees the terrorist as a criminal with no regard for human life.

However it is defined, terrorism has become a serious problem in the post-Cold War era, though, as mentioned before, it is not limited to this particular period. Over the past twenty years, terrorists have committed extremely violent acts for alleged political or religious reasons. Political ideology ranges from the far left to the far right. For instance, the far left consists of groups, such as Marxists and Leninists, who propose a revolution of workers led by revolutionary elite. On the far right, dictatorships can be found that typically believe in a merging of state. Religious extremists, on the other hand, often reject the authority of secular governments and view legal systems that are not based on their religious beliefs as illegitimate. They also view modernization efforts as corrupting influences on traditional culture.

Above all, terrorism influences an audience beyond the immediate victims. The strategy of terrorists is to commit acts of violence that draw the attention of the local populace, the government, and the world to their cause. The terrorists plan their attack to

obtain the greatest publicity, choosing targets that symbolize what they oppose. The effectiveness of the terrorist act lies not in the act itself, but in the public's or government's reaction to the act. For instance, the September 11, 2001 attacks killed about 3000 people. They were immediate victims. But their real target was the American people and the United States government.

After this terrorist attack, the United States President George W. Bush declared a war against terrorism and many states supported him (See, Mahajan, 2002). But the fact that terrorists do not fight on clear fronts and do not play according to the rules of war makes struggling with terrorism extremely difficult. The United States and its supporters have been relatively successful in defeating and punishing the governments in Afghanistan and Iraq claimed to be supporting terrorist acts. Yet it seems that it is not possible to terminate terrorism with these defeats. On the contrary, the United States invasions and its increasing influences in the Middle East -and elsewhere- brought about mass reactions, feeding, indeed, many terrorist organizations. Consequently, no matter how the United States and its allies can be militarily strong, the threat posed by various terrorist organizations will likely to continue in the years to come.

The post-Cold War period also witnessed the resurgence of North-South economic antagonism. Such confrontation is not new. It has occurred before in international arena. But in accordance with the decline of ideological clashes, it has begun to occupy a more significant agenda in international affairs.

To understand the greater consequences of the present North-South conflict, some historical perspective is needed. In the early 1970s, developing countries at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) coalesced into what became known as the Group of 77 to press their demands for a New International Economic Order (NIEO). This aspiration grew out of the neo-Marxist political economy theory of the 1960s, which argued that the international trading system was condemning the "periphery" -Latin America and other developing countries- to poverty, exploitation, and dependency. Among other measures, the NIEO specifically called for a system of price supports for a number of key developing country commodity exports, indexation of developing country export prices to developed countries' manufactured exports, technology transfer, and the negotiated re-deployment of some developed country industries to developing nations. By the 1980s, the NIEO agenda at the United Nations had foundered due to divergences in developing country interests, the inability to replicate OPEC's success with other commodities and, most importantly, the discrediting of its command-based economic theories. This was evidenced by

the astonishing success of Taiwan, South Korea and others that pursued trade liberalization and export-led growth.

Thirty years later, at Cancun, many officials opined that the harsh rhetoric employed by major developing countries, such as Brazil and India, as well as smaller African and Caribbean countries, was strongly reminiscent of the 1970s UNCTAD experience. The themes of Northern economic exploitation have become fashionably recurrent, even though the remedies demanded by the South at the WTO now differ from the NIEO. Rather than price supports for commodities and exports, developing countries at Cancun called for unilateral trade concessions and compensation by the rich countries.

While there were many reasons enumerated for the failure at Cancun, the common theme was that talks fell apart along a North-South divide. The G-21 opposed developed countries' agricultural subsidies. The Lesser Developed Countries (LDC) refused to lower their astronomical agriculture and manufacturing tariffs, which stoked the frustration of the United States and others (See, Sevilla, 2003).

With the talks ended with no clear success, the conflict between the poor developing nations living in the Southern Hemisphere and the rich industrial countries of the North has entered a new phase. The phenomenon of the economic dependence of the developing countries on the multinational companies from the industrialized countries is named today *neokolonialismus*, what refers to the economic exploitation of these countries, which resembles the conditions in the colonial age in various regards. With global problems like the climate change, a further dimension of injustice is added: Whereas the problems are caused over proportionality in the North, the consequences of the desertification or extreme weather conditions occur over proportionally in the South. This extends to the threat to the existence of numerous small island states, which will no longer exist if the sea level continues to rise any further (See, Seligson and Passe-Smith, 2003).

It remains marking that the economic North-South conflict has not led so far to military conflicts. Many critics, nevertheless, see to the *neokolonialismus* as one main cause for the re-flashing of terrorism in the 21 century. Growing economic globalization in the post-Cold War era does not appear to be breaking the historical stratifications between the North and South. Rather, it is economic globalization that channeled by past grooves of strong and weak growth. The national units already integrated to the world economy become more integrated to the world economy; the less well-connected often stay that way. So far only a very small number of states have managed to break out of the low-growth ruts of the world system. The implications of this grim outcome for world political stability are stark. To the extent that

poverty and underdevelopment facilitate continuing conflict between the North and South, we may expect to see international order as fragile.

Finally, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, shattering the bipolar system, resulted in power gaps in some region and triggered struggles for influence. In the post-Cold War environment, states that seemed to be in the same bloc or former allies became competing rivals. For instance, the European Union, as well as Japan, rose as rival centers of power against established United States dominance. No doubt the rise of China and the resurgence of the Russian Federation as powerful rivals to the United States are also notable. States -or integrations- aspiring to become world powers (such as Russia, China, and the European Union), states seeking to strengthen their position as regional powers with burgeoning ambition to become global powers in the future (like Iran and Turkey), and the United States still holding onto its position are strategizing to reach their goals in Eurasia. Especially the newly independent states of Eurasia lie at the center of power struggles. The United States is pushing forward to not only maintain but strengthen alliances with various states in the region. Particularly three states, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, are at the center of much of this struggle. So as to promote their national interests in the region, major powers have often been motivated to take advantage of destabilizing conflicts between these states and alternatively have attempted to follow a path of reconciliation or proposing cooperation, fluctuating between these options based on a calculation of which would best fit their own broader agenda and vision for the region (See, Simons, 2008).

There are several reasons for why especially the South Caucasus represents a significant regional interest for major powers, in general, and for the United States, in particular. Controlling the region means to contain Russian expansion, to contain Iran, to control natural resources in the region, to secure safe transportation of the region's natural resources to the global market, and to acquire bases for "war against terrorism" (See, Aslanli, 2008).

At present, the United States continues to strengthen its position in the South Caucasus. However, resurgent Russia certainly does not welcome this development and feels compelled to punish both American military interventions in the region, as well as regional states that espouse pro-American policies (See, Kanet, 2007). The latest Georgian conflict is a clear indication of how far Russia is willing to go to defend its own interests in the complicated and unpredictable region.

CONCLUSION

In discussing the post-Cold War developments and the emerging world order in that era, several concluding remarks can be drawn from the above analysis, summarized as follows:

- The new international system in the post-Cold War period has been marked by a seeming contradiction: on the one hand, fragmentation; on the other, growing globalization. This trend will likely to be holding.

- On the level of the relations among states, the new world order is based on major power cooperation. The international system contains at least five major powers –the United States, Europe, Russia, Japan, and China. There appears to be no serious challenger to these powers. That means the world politics in the near future will largely be shaped by the above-mentioned major powers.

- Among major powers, the United States will continue to be the greatest hegemonic power in the short run, but its military and economic power will gradually decline. In the long run, some growing states or integrations will likely to get close to the United States' power. Hence, the international system will possibly gain a multipolar character in the future, though it may take some decades to reach that point.

- International relations have become truly global in the post-Cold War world. Communications are instantaneous and the world economy operates on all continents simultaneously. A whole set o issues has surfaced that can only be dealt with on a worldwide basis, such as nuclear proliferation, the environment, the population explosion, and economic interdependence.

- In conjunction with increasing international cooperation, inter-state wars have declined and "low politics" gained greater importance in international affairs. The years to come, however, are likely to witness severe competition of major powers on natural resources, particularly, energy resources. In this regard, disputes about unfair trade practices and worries about dependence on externally concentrated or monopolistic sources of goods, services and

technologies will remain to be addressed. But the prospects for collective rules and regulations, rather than unilateral accusations and restrictions, will seem to be improved.

- With the spread of global market economy and rapid expansion of foreign investments, developing countries, though they are cautious about foreign investments, are likely to be doing better in the future. But structurally-rooted North-South inequalities will seem to remain as a potential source of international conflict.

- The North-South conflict aside, the post-Cold War world faces several other threats, most notably, ethnically-driven conflicts, religious militancy and terrorism, supported by some revisionist powers. These are particularly challenging threats as they are beyond the full control of nation-states, calling for international cooperation if they are to be effectively dealt with. Thus, the future of the world will depend on whether major powers, in particular, and the international community, in general, are able to show the will to cooperate on these serious problems.

NOTES

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[1] Source: http://www.un.org.peace/bnote010101.pdf (December 16, 2008).

[2] Source: http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0904550.html (December 18, 2008).

[3] For further information, visit http//en.wikipedia.org./wiki/terrorism (January 28, 2009).

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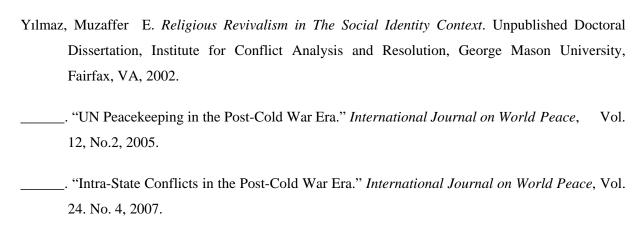
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