Cooperative Security in the 21^{st} Century

Dr. Michael Mihalka [∗]

> *Historians may well look back on the first years of the twenty-first century as a decisive moment in the human story. The different societies that make up the human family are today interconnected as never before. They face threats that no nation can hope to master by acting alone – and opportunities that can be much more hopefully exploited if all nations work together.*[1]

The events of 11 September 2001 marked the beginning of a new era in cooperative security. On September 12, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1368, which applied the inherent right of self-defense under the UN Charter to the response to the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, and called on "all states to work together urgently to bring to justice the perpetrators, organizers, and sponsors of these terrorist attacks."[2] This statement is remarkable in applying Article 51 to a non-state actor. Before this, Article 51 was viewed as applying only to states. This recognition that non-state threats represented a major cause of security concern was consistent with the my earlier work on cooperative security in the pre-9/11 era, in which cooperative security is defined as states working together to deal with non-state threats.[3]

Definitions

Cooperative security as a term is often used rather loosely in the international relations literature.[4] The term often simply means that states will work together to solve common problems, and is often used synonymously with *collective security* – that is, to mean simply that states work collectively together. However, collective security also often has a more specific meaning in the international relations literature, in which it is used to describe a kind of security system in which states agree to act together against one of

---

[∗] Michael Mihalka is Associate Professor of Full Spectrum Operations (Strategic/Operational), US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, USA.

[1] Kofi Annan, Foreword to "A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility," Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change; available at www.un.org/secureworld/, accessed June 20, 2005.

[2] S.C. Res. 1368, UN SCOR, 56th Sess., 4370th mtg. at 1; UN Doc. S/RES/1368, 12 September 2001. This statement was reaffirmed in S.C. Res. 1373, UN SCOR, 56th Sess., 4385th mtg., UN Doc. S/RES/1373, 28 September 2001 ("reaffirming the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense as recognized by the Charter of the United Nations as reiterated in Resolution 1368 [2001]).

[3] Michael Mihalka, with Richard Cohen, *Cooperative Security: New Horizons for International Order*, Marshall Center Paper No. 3 (Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany: George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies, April 2001); Mihalka, "Concepts of Cooperative Security" (in Russian) *Vestnik* 1 (Moscow State University, 2001).

[4] Ibid.

the members of the system that takes aggressive actions against another. The terms *common security* and *comprehensive security* are also often used, where common security means that states are affected equally by a common threat, such as nuclear war, the threat being more the effects of the war rather than the country that uses the nuclear weapons, and where comprehensive security means a security regime that encompasses both the so-called traditional threats associated typically and specifically with state actors, and non-traditional threats, which mean everything else. To minimize confusion, I have reserved the term *cooperative security* to describe cases where states work together to deal with non-state threats and challenges.

Trends in the International System Conducive to Cooperative Security

Several trends in the international system have made cooperative security increasingly important as the main mode to deal with threats posed by non-state actors. The trends include a dramatic decline in the incidence of interstate war, precipitated in part by the change in the global distribution of power after the end of the Cold War that left the United States as the only clear remaining global superpower. Other trends include the United States' support of a liberal economic and political order that has led to less direct state control over many areas in the world that had previously lived under dictatorships or centrally-planned economic systems. In addition, we have seen a corresponding increase in globalization and the realization of a global commons, and an attendant rise in the perceived importance of transnational actors.[5] In addition, regional actors and organizations have gained in importance as well.

Although cooperative security has become the preferred mode of security cooperation in the world, some recent trends in the United States appear to undercut cooperative approaches. For one, the United States may have become too dominant militarily. This has had two adverse consequences for cooperative security. First, other countries may feel less inclined to act cooperatively, because they can simply rely on the Untied States to provide global security. Second, this dominance, and the perception that other countries are not doing enough, has led the United States to articulate a national security policy that advocates preemption and comes close to endorsing the notion of preventive war.

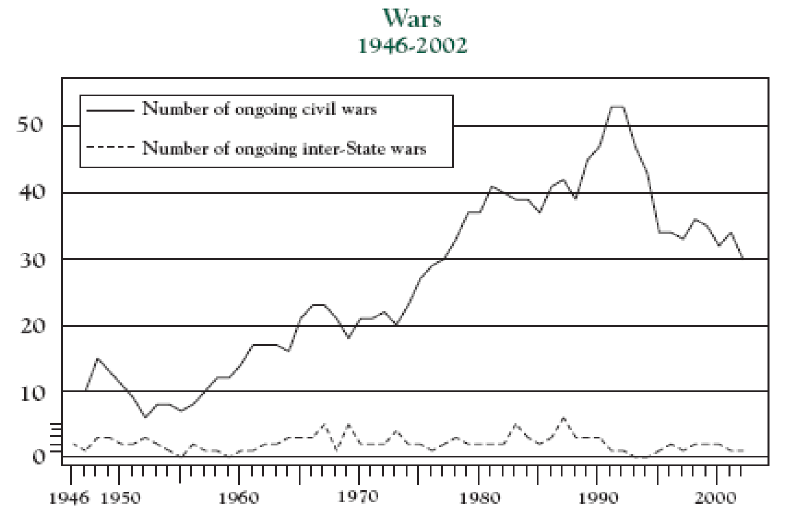
The End of Interstate War?

One of the important features of the post-Cold War era is the sharp decline in the prevalence of interstate war. The Center for International Development and Conflict

---

[5] The notion of a global commons perhaps first gained wide currency with a widely anthologized article by Garret Hardin: "Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968): 1243–48. For a recent discussion, see Stephen M. Gardiner, "The Real Tragedy of the Commons," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 30:4 (Fall 2001): 387–416.

Mangement has tracked trends in interstate and intrastate conflict from 1949 to 2004.[6] The magnitude of interstate war remained at the same level up to the late eighties, and then declined sharply in the 1990s. The magnitude of intrastate conflict peaked around 1990, and has since declined. As Figure One shows, while there were never more than five interstate conflicts ongoing in any one year in the 1990s, the number of ongoing intrastate conflicts rose to over 50 in 1992 and declined to around 30 by 2002.[7] This intrastate war has become an increasingly relevant source of security concern, especially compared with the problems posed by states in the past.



Source: Department of Peace and Conflict Research at Uppsala University; and International Peace Research Institute, Oslo.

The implications for cooperative security as I have defined it are profound. Other states come to pose an increasingly smaller proportion of security concerns, as states become more preoccupied with threats posed by non-state actors and general environmental conditions.

Numerous articles have appeared detailing the security problems posed by non-state actors and downplaying the importance of traditional threats. Even the National Security Strategy of the United States, issued in 2002, suggests that failing states have become a greater security concern than traditional state competitors because they provide breeding grounds for lawlessness, terrorism, and internal conflict that may spill over into neighboring states.

---

[6] Monty Marshall and Ted Robert Gurr, *Peace and Conflict 2005* (College Park, Maryland: University of Maryland, 2005). Available at http://www.cidcm.umd.edu/inscr/PC05print.pdf (accessed September 13, 2005)

[7] Cf., Report of the Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* (New York: United Nations, December 2004), 9; available at http://www.un.org/secureworld/report3.pdf (accessed 27 May 2005).

A great many articles and monographs have emphasized that changes in the international system have altered how people now think about security. Particularly relevant is the report of the United Nations High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change in December 2004. The panel noted that the "the preoccupation of the United Nations founders was with State security." Today, however, the threats encompass "poverty, infectious disease and environmental degradation; war and violence within states; the spread and possible use of nuclear, radiological, chemical, and biological weapons; terrorism; and transnational organized crime."[8] The character of what is perceived as a threat has changed from one emanating from the ambitions of an individual state to a set of transnational conditions that affect all states regionally and globally.

Concerns with transnational threats have only come to the fore because states are no longer concerned about the prospects for their continued existence. Nazi Germany and fascist Japan sought to eliminate their neighbors and enslave their populations. The United States and the Soviet Union were locked in an ideological competition for the hearts and mind of the globe. It is only with the end of the Soviet Union that states could afford to become much more concerned with transnational threats, since there was no longer any significant threat to states as such.

The Change in the Global Balance of Power and the Victory of Liberalism

The change in the global distribution of power that occurred with the rapid deterioration and breakup of the Soviet Union was not sufficient in and of itself to cause the marked decline in the perception of state-based threats. One might expect that a sharp decline in the power of one main actor in the international system would lead to the reordering of the alliance structure. This certainly happened after World War II, when the victors went their separate ways and set up opposing alliance systems, NATO and the Warsaw Pact. After the end of the Cold War, the weaker major powers in the system—the Western Europeans and Japan—could have allied with the defeated power, Russia, to oppose the sole remaining "hyperpower," the United States. This did not happen. Instead, the Europeans proclaimed that the relevance of military power had declined, and that the "hour of Europe" had arrived.[9] Economics would solve all security problems. The Europeans did not and still do not feel that the preponderance of U.S. military power poses a threat to their survival.

---

[8] Ibid.

[9] Cf. Michael Mihalka, "Political Economy, Weltanschauung and the Transformation of European Security," *European Security* (December 2001).

The economic success of the nations of Western Europe rests directly on the liberal economic global order that is supported by U.S. military power.[10] The World Bank, the International Monetary Fond, and the predecessor of the World Trade Organization (the Global Agreement on Trades and Tariffs, which remains in force) all promote a system that favors free trade and less government involvement in economic affairs. The end of the Soviet Union and the shift toward pro-market policies pursued by the Chinese leadership meant that the liberal economic order would be extended globally. Most countries today have joined or are aspiring to join the World Trade Organization, which requires states to support free trade rather than protectionism.

A liberal political order has not spread as widely or quickly as the liberal economic order. Nevertheless, Freedom House, a non-governmental organization, reports sure and steady progress in this regard since the early 1990s.[11] Although they classified only 19 percent of the world's population as free in 1993, the corresponding figure in 2003 was 44 percent. In 1993, 44 percent of the world was considered "partly free," a percentage that had had declined to 20 percent by 2003. Over 35 percent of the world population resides in not-free states, with a large proportion of this figure accounted for by China's classification as being not free (China alone represents 20 percent of the world's population).

No major country is currently advocating the spread of a political or economic ideology that opposes the regime of liberal democracy or free markets. Moreover, both the United States and the European Union actively sponsor programs to promote the spread of liberal democracy.

The spread of liberal economic and political values promotes cooperative security. Countries developed the habit of cooperation by working together to address global issues through the WTO and other organizations. Major economic powers have developed similar habits by working together through the Group of Eight industrial democracies to address concerns of international trade, energy, development, and terrorism.

The Use of Force in Cooperative Security and the Rise of Humanitarian Intervention

Many of the examples of cooperative security used throughout this essay do not involve the use of force. However, we have seen throughout the 1990s and beyond an increasing interest in humanitarian intervention. While humanitarian intervention remains contentious in the international legal and political science community, it falls well within the definition of cooperative security used here.[12] In a recent volume on humanitarian intervention, J.L. Holzgrefe defined the concept as:

---

[10] Much of the world moved to a system of free trade based on the Bretton Woods agreements of 1944. See Robert Gilpin, *Global Political Economy: Understanding the International Economic Order* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

[11] Adrian Karatnycky, "Gains for Freedom Amid Terror and Uncertainty," in *Freedom in the World 2004*; available at www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/2004/essay2004.pdf (accessed 27 May 2005).

> The threat or use of force across borders by a state (or group of states) aimed at preventing or ending widespread and grave violations of the fundamental human rights of individuals other than its own citizens, without the permission of the state within whose territory force is applied.[13]

For our purposes, what is important is the focus on the need to protect human rights, which is not necessarily the same as a need to act against the country in which the violations are taking place. A group of states is thus acting to deal with a non-state security challenge, even though that may mean violating the principle of non-intervention in the affairs of another state.

NATO's intervention in Kosovo represents an important case study of cooperative security and the use of force. Many legal scholars find that the intervention "reflects the problems of an undeveloped rule of law in a morally dangerous situation."[14] Most thought it was illegal, but others have argued:

> [T]he absence of consensus on human rights [among the permanent members] means that [the Council's] remedial action … is unlikely [in cases of grave human rights violations requiring a forceful response]. Yet the international legal process's demand for a remedy for grave violations … has become so powerful and urgent that democratic governments that are susceptible to non-governmental influence and that have the wherewithal to effect a remedy are under grave pressure to act unilaterally. Hence for the purposes of the enforcement of human rights … enforcement through the Security Council [should be used], if it can be achieved, but enforcement unilaterally if it cannot.[15]

Although few in the international community would agree with this quote, many acknowledge the growing importance of human rights as an issue of international concern, and some have even squared the circle on sovereignty and intervention by noting that sovereignty derives from the rights of the individual and that the international community takes precedence over the state as the ultimate guarantor of human rights.[16]

---

[12] Robert Keohane, "Introduction," in J. L. Holzgrefe and Robert O. Keohane, ed., *Humanitarian Intervention: Ethical, Legal and Political Dilemmas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

[13] J.L. Holzgrefe, "The Humanitarian Intervention Debate," in *Humanitarian Intervention*, 18.

[14] Jonathon I. Charney, "Anticipatory Humanitarian Intervention in Kosovo," *American Journal of International Law* 93:4 (Oct. 1999): 841.

[15] W. Michael Reisman, "Unilateral Action and the Transformation of the World Constitutive Process: The Special Problem of Humanitarian Intervention," *European Journal of International Law* 11 (2000): 7–8, as quoted in Tom J. Farer, "Humanitarian intervention before and after 9/11: Legality and Legitimacy," in *Humanitarian Intervention*.

[16] See Thomas G. Weiss and Jarat Choppa, "Sovereignty under Siege: From Intervention to Humanitarian Space," in *Beyond Westphalia? State Sovereignty and International Intervention*, ed. Gene M. Lyons and Michael Mastanduno (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995).

The Rise of Globalization, Transnational Challenges, and the "Limits of Self-Protection"

Globalization has often been viewed as something that is largely a pursuit of avaricious transnational corporations that has proceeded divorced from broader economic and political trends. In fact, globalization has proceeded in fits and starts, and reflects the conscious choices of states to participate in the liberal economic and political order.

By easing traffic of all kinds across borders, globalization also changes the character of the security challenges that countries face. The UN High Level Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change concluded, "Today's threats recognize no national boundaries, are connected, and must be addressed at the global and regional as well as national levels. No state, no matter how powerful, can by its own efforts alone make itself invulnerable to today's threats."[17] The UN study argues that many of the security challenges that states will face in the twenty-first century are interconnected. For example, it argues that "preventing mass-casualty terrorism requires a deep engagement to strengthen collective security systems, ameliorate poverty, combat extremism, end the grievances that flow from war, tackle the spread of infectious disease and fight organized crime."[18] The UN identifies six groups of threats that are of particular concern now and in the foreseeable future:

1. Economic and social threats, including poverty, infectious disease, and environmental degradation;
2. Inter-state conflict;
3. Internal conflict, including civil war, genocide, and other large-scale atrocities;
4. Nuclear, radiological, chemical, and biological weapons;
5. Terrorism;
6. Transnational organized crime.[19]

The UN study states, "The world has seen few inter-state wars over the past sixty years."[20] However, it has very little to say about any specific threat posed by any particular group or phenomenon, but rather stresses the connection between regional disputes and the other five security challenges. So the real issue for the UN is not so much interstate conflict—for which it has all the requisite authority to manage—but transnational threats, where its authority is much less clear.

The UN study repeatedly makes the point that no one state can address transnational threats alone:

> No state, no matter how powerful, can by its own efforts alone make itself invulnerable to today's threats. Every state requires the cooperation of other states to make itself secure. It is in every state's interest, accordingly, to cooperate with other states to

---

[17] *A More Secure World*, 1.
[18] Ibid., 17.
[19] Ibid., 23.
[20] Ibid., 31.

> address their most pressing threats, because doing so will maximize the chances of reciprocal cooperation to address its own threat priorities.[21]

The Necessity of Cooperative Security

In other words, the UN study argues that cooperative security in the sense that is used in this study is necessary in order to address today's threats. Transnational threats by definition span traditional state boundaries. Thus, addressing the problems in one state will not necessarily resolve the issues in other states. In fact, a rigorous program to address transnational problems such as terrorism in a single state will likely only succeed in shifting the problems to another state. In domestic law enforcement, crackdowns in one area may lead to increased crime in neighboring areas, a phenomenon known as displacement.[22] This is why the security strategies of both the United States and the European Union place such great emphasis on failed states – transnational terrorists can move freely across these porous and un-policed borders. Only by states acting together can most of these issues be resolved.

The United States: Facilitator or Obstacle for Further Cooperative Security?

The U.S.-led interventions against Afghanistan and Iraq after 9/11 would seem at first blush not to constitute examples of cooperative security, since they were actions against sovereign states. However, the U.S. justified both actions as part of its campaign against terrorism. Afghanistan harbored Osama bin Laden and refused to apprehend him and turn him over to the U.S., while Saddam Hussein was accused of continuing to further a program of weapons of mass destruction. Vice President Dick Cheney, for example, justified the intervention in Iraq because "simply stated, there is no doubt that Saddam Hussein now has weapons of mass destruction" and "had a relationship with Al Qaeda that stretched back through most of the decade of the '90s."[23] Cheney also maintained, "We believe he has, in fact, reconstituted nuclear weapons."[24] In justifying action against Hussein, Cheney argued, "Deliverable weapons of mass destruction in the hands of a terror network or a murderous dictator, or the two working together, constitutes as grave a threat as can be imagined."[25]

For its part, the National Security Strategy of the United States of 2002 argues that the greatest threat to the country is the nexus of transnational terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. The U.S. does not believe that it will face a peer competitor in the military realm in the near term, and has adopted a strategy to ensure that one will not arise in the mid- to long term. The U.S. intends to maintain its dominance by retaining control of the global commons (air, space, high seas)—at least militarily—and to dissuade other states from trying to compete in those areas.[26] Although Donald Rumsfeld made these comments regarding nuclear weapons, they apply equally well to all aspects of the global commons:

---

[21] Ibid., 16.

[22] See Michael S. Scott, "The Benefits and Consequences of Police Crackdowns," available at www.popcenter.org/Responses/response-crackdowns.htm (accessed 20 June 2005).

[23] "Cheney in Wonderland," *Los Angeles Times*, 16 September 2003.

[24] "The Man With No Ear," *New York Times*, 27 June 2003.

[25] Dana Milbank, "Cheney Says Iraqi Strike Is Justified; Hussein Poses Threat, He Declares," *Washington Post*, 27 August 2002.

> Some have asked why in the post-Cold War we need to maintain as many as 1,700 to 2,200 operationally deployed warheads. The fact that the Soviet threat has receded does not mean that we no longer need nuclear weapons. To the contrary, the U.S. nuclear arsenal remains an important part of our deterrent strategy and helps us to dissuade the emergence of potential or would-be peer competitors by underscoring the futility of trying to sprint toward parity with us.[27]

The U.S. is willing to spend to ensure it retains it dominance. By some accounts, it is responsible for over 50 percent of total global defense spending, and spends as much on military research alone as the country that spends the second-most amount on defense overall.

The U.S. supports liberalism (political systems based on individual rights), but it is also hegemonic in promoting the spread of liberalism.[28] The U.S. does not favor the consensus-based approach to cooperative security pursued by the Western Europeans, leading many of them to accuse the U.S. of unilateral behavior. According to the German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, "The international coalition against terror does not provide a basis for doing just anything against anybody—and certainly not by going it alone. This is the view of every European foreign minister."[29] This leads to a curious paradox: the hegemonic nature of American liberalism has created an environment that permits cooperative security, but the U.S. does not seem to be so cooperative itself, at least as far as such matters as the Kyoto environmental treaty or the International Criminal Court are concerned. This apparent paradox will continue. The U.S. quest for continuing dominance will provide the environment in which others are able to engage in consensus-based cooperative security, but the U.S. will participate in such efforts only when it can lead.[30]

---

[26] See Office of Force Transformation, *Elements of Defense Transformation* (Washington, DC: Office of the Secretary of Defense, October 2004); available at www.oft.osd.mil/library/library_files/document_383_ElementsOfTransformation_LR.pdf (accessed 10 June 2005).

[27] Donald H. Rumsfeld, hearings before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 17 July 2002; available at www.afa.org/magazine/sept2002/0902rumsfeld.asp (accessed 10 June 2005).

[28] For a discussion of hegemonic liberalism, see Charles William Maynes, "U.S. Role in the Word: What are the Choices?" in *Great Decisions 2000* (New York: Foreign Policy Association, 2000).

[29] See "Germany warns U.S. against unilateralism," *BBC News Online*, 12 February 2002; available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1816395.stm (accessed 10 June 2005).

Conclusions and Observations

Cooperative security has become the main mode whereby states cooperate with each other. The rise of globalization has seen the attendant rise of transnational problems that can only be addressed through the local, regional, and global cooperation of states. The continued dominance of the United States and the continuing spread of liberal values means that no peer competitor to the Untied States will appear in the near future to threaten this cooperative security regime. It is one of the great ironies of this regime that the United States is viewed as the primary antagonist to cooperative security, but its dominance and support for liberal values provides the necessary context for the cooperation that does occur.

---

[30] For more on the relative benefits and drawbacks of hegemonism, see G. John Ikenberry, "Getting Hegemony Right," *The National Interest* 63 (Spring 2001), available at www.ocf.berkeley.edu/%7Egobev/fp/readings/Ikenberry.txt; Clark S. Judge, "Hegemony of the Heart," *Policy Review* 110 (December 2001/ January 2002), available at www.ocf.berkeley.edu/~gobev/ipe/readings/Judge.txt; and Stanley Kurtz, "The Future of 'History,'" *Policy Review* 113 (June/July 2002), available at www.ocf.berkeley.edu/%7egobev/fp/readings/kurtz.txt.