

**Confronting Violence in Post-Communist Societies:
Conflict Transformation, Peacekeeping and the former Yugoslavia**

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The waning of the Cold War and the resulting fall of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe brought about a tremendous growth in United Nations peacekeeping at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s. While these developments were generally celebrated with enthusiasm as the coming of a “new world order” and of a revitalized UN, the fall of communism also brought about large-scale crises in every post-communist state and, more importantly, not a single federation of the post-communist region survived. Only in one state, Czechoslovakia, was a division of a country managed without violence. The Soviet Union’s break-up was also a negotiated divorce in large part, but was accompanied by violent conflict in the Transcaucasus and Tadjikistan. For Yugoslavia, tragically, the post-communist transition meant war from the very outset.

As the fighting raged in Croatia and spread to Bosnia-Herzegovina, the international community, beginning with the European Community, made several attempts to intervene. Yet, this particular war was difficult to understand, especially in the European context: ceasefires repeatedly broke down and only seemed to lead to further escalation of the conflict, branding “ethnic cleansing” into the 1990s international vocabulary. Yet, as the developed world watched TV images of neighbour turning on neighbour in a country that had hitherto been a respected and strong actor in the NNA group of states, calls to “do something” could not be ignored.

When the problem of stopping the Yugoslav conflict was finally handed over to the United Nations, they too appeared ill-prepared and ill-equipped to deal with the matter, in spite of Boutros Boutros-Ghali’s bold and optimistic attempt to re-invigorate the UN Charter’s collective security provisions with *An Agenda for Peace*. After more than three years’ involvement and mounting the largest and most expensive peacekeeping operation to date, the UN’s limited successes seemed to confine themselves to the narrow humanitarian aspects of its mission. Ironically, it was the use of force that ended the UN operation: in

Croatia, the Croatian Army conquered the Serb-held areas inside the United Nations Protected Areas in the two offensives of May and August 1995; in Bosnia-Herzegovina, a negotiated settlement was finally achieved after the Bosnian Serbs were weakened by NATO's *Operation Deliberate Force*, which was followed up by a successful ground campaign by Bosnian Croat and Government forces. [\[1\]](#)

But the questions still remain: Was UN Peacekeeping, a conflict management tool developed during the Cold War to ultimately avoid a clash between the superpowers, appropriate for the dealing with a post-communist conflict? Confronted by continuing violence at the local level and blocked by the intransigence of community leaders, are Blue Helmets and the civilian components of a UN operation powerless to do anything? We can gain some insight into the problems raised by these two questions by briefly examining the broad nature of UN Peacekeeping and looking at issues related to post-communist transition.

UN Peacekeeping was developed as an *ad hoc* instrument, whose legal basis contains elements of both Chapter VI ("peaceful settlement of disputes") and Chapter VII ("action with respect to threats to the peace, breaches of the peace, and acts of aggression") of the UN Charter. Its evolution has spanned the spectrum of unarmed observer missions (i.e. Middle East) to armed interventions (Congo). There are, however, important distinctions to be made between *peace-enforcement*, such as the UN-sanctioned intervention against Iraq in the Gulf War, and *peacekeeping*: peacekeeping requires consent of the parties to the conflict, impartiality towards the parties in conflict and non-use of force except for self-defence; peace-enforcement does not. More recent developments, the so-called *second-generation* peacekeeping operations, have expanded the concept to include diversified and multi-disciplinary aspects - for example, humanitarian assistance, organizing elections, demobilization and re-integration of combatants into civilian life - and focus on intra-state conflicts, with the primary goal of rebuilding the structures of civil society.

The results of this evolution are basically two-fold. First, UN Peacekeeping Operations have adopted a much more *active* role with regard to dealing with parties to a conflict and the presence of UN peacekeepers in a country now involves much more contact

with the local populace than in traditional interposition missions. Second, in line with their growing complexity, UN Peacekeeping Operations are conceived of as constituting three inter-related functions: *Peacemaking, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding*[\[2\]](#):

- ***Peacemaking***: assisting the leaders of the parties to the conflict and other community leaders to define and accept a just resolution of their differences. It aims to have the parties to the conflict redefine their goals, so as to make their objectives mutually acceptable. It is primarily diplomatic action.
- ***Peacekeeping*** (in its narrow sense): controlling and stopping armed conflict by establishing and monitoring ceasefires, either by unarmed military observers or armed peacekeeping forces, in order to create a stable and favourable climate for the complete resolution of the conflict. It aims to control the physical actions and behaviour of the belligerents. It is primarily military and police action.
- ***Peacebuilding***: reconstructing and supporting political and socio-economic infrastructure in order to facilitate reconciliation and normalization of relations between and within communities affected by the conflict. It aims to eliminate the root causes of the conflict and focuses on (re-)establishing civil society. It is primarily social action, consisting of both political and economic activities.

The key to linking peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding functions is to do so both at the macro and the micro levels, working pro-actively at both levels and shifting the focus of efforts between the two as obstacles crop up or local leaders become intransigent. Moreover, each of these three functions must be directed at specific aspects of a conflict structure. To conceptualize these linkages, Johan Galtung's "ABC" triangular model of conflict lends itself well to our analysis. According to this model[\[3\]](#), conflict and conflict spirals are defined as an interaction of a contradiction (parties pursuing incompatible goals in a goal-seeking system) with behaviour (actions undertaken to force an opponent to modify his/her goals or other actions perceived as threatening) and attitudes (conflicting perceptions about the conflict, negative assumptions or a hostile psychological state towards an opposing group).

Thus, by using peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding to “attack” the different elements of this conflict structure, we have the following conflict transformation model for UN Peacekeeping Operations:



In terms of this model, the Yugoslav conflict is defined as follows:

Contradiction: The basic conflict involved opposing goals between members of a new political elite, comprising both the old *nomenklatura* and new actors, whose ethno-nationalist rhetoric and shift to regional and republican power bases delegitimized the concept of a federal “Yugoslav” nation-state, in the civic sense - especially by failing to hold democratic elections at the federal level before doing so at the republican levels. Competition between republican and minority group leaders began to define itself increasingly in zero-sum terms. At the micro level, the new nationalisms split communities along ethnic lines, with local leaders reviving suppressed memories of past inter-ethnic strife, primarily as it related to the 1941-45 civil war and Axis occupation.

Attitudes: As stereotypes and scapegoating took hold, conflict attitudes in the form of security dilemmas began to manifest themselves and gradually expressed themselves in a complex interplay of fear and hatred between ethnic groups and individuals. At the macro-level, this generally involved the dispute over the right to self-determination of minority vs. majority (Gligorov's: "Why should I be a minority in your country when you could be a minority in mine"); at the micro-level the security dilemma was reflected in concern over personal security and the rallying of kin ethnic groups.

Behaviour: This aspect is well-documented – a vicious circle of conflict breeding fear breeding hatred breeding atrocities, the impulse for revenge taking on the character of an inter-generational cycle of vengeance, and the myth of collective guilt justifying all excess.

For UNPROFOR (later UNPF) in Croatia and Bosnia, the task was to reconcile the leaders at the macro level to stop the fighting and reconstitute mixed ethnic communities. However, at the micro level, little was being done to break the power wielded over the population by warlords or the "new totalitarian warriors", as André Glucksman refers to them. In many cases, the humanitarian assistance provided by the UN actually strengthened the influence of extremists, by enabling them to control the distribution of aid. Without adequate manpower and resources to maintain local superiority, the UN Peacekeeping Force could not provide the necessary measure of security to the local communities in order to allow them to seek protection from the UN instead of the warlords. This was the case in the UNPAs as well as in the Safe Areas. Consequently, even though the war in Croatia was reasonably contained, the dispute could not be resolved through negotiation in such a tense situation; and in Bosnia the war just raged on, despite a few transient ceasefires. Without sufficient external incentives, coercion or other pressure, peacemaking initiatives never really took hold and, in the climate of insecurity and conflict, there was little hope for initiating peacebuilding to try to change attitudes and reconcile communities.[\[4\]](#)

Could UNPROFOR have stopped and resolved the wars in Croatia and Bosnia at an early stage? This question is the object of a long and continuing debate and defies an easy answer. But the weak commitments by the member states of the UN to support the mission did not give UNPROFOR the necessary resources to establish the necessary local security - even if nothing more than to create a few “islands of peace” upon which to subsequently build. Perhaps more could have been done in the field to isolate extremists and support moderate forces; but to succeed in the long run, powerful incentives and broad commitments were needed in order to boost the case for inter-ethnic cooperation.

Vaclav Havel remarked in his essay, *The Post-Communist Nightmare*: “In today’s world, everything is the affair of everyone. Just as communism itself concerned everyone, so too it is now for everyone to determine if and how we can succeed in constructing, on the ruins of what communism left for us, a new space for democracy, freedom and prosperity.”^[5] For UN Peacekeeping, the challenge remains to continue to develop and adapt conflict-resolution strategies for dealing with conflict in the post-communist world and avoiding the pitfalls of UNPROFOR

^[1] This brief paper is only concerned with UN peacekeeping efforts in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina. While the UN missions in these two areas were different, events were inter-related. This is particularly notable in a series of events put in motion by the Croatian Army’s successful attack on UNPA Sector West (UN Protected Area, Western Slavonia, Croatia) at the beginning of May 1995. The weak international response sent a strong signal to the Bosnian Serbs that the UN lacked the resolve to protect areas under its protection or control. The fall of UNPA West was followed first by the fall of the Safe Areas of Srebrenica and Zepa two months later to Bosnian Serb forces and then, in August 1995, of the remaining UNPAs in Croatia (except Eastern Slavonia) to the Croatian Army.

^[2] These definitions of Peacemaking, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding are derived from United Nations terminology. For example. See Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace (Second Edition)*, New York, United Nations, 1995, pp.12-20.

^[3] Johan Galtung, "Violence, Peace and Peace Research", *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 6, no. 3, 1969, pp.11-33. C.R. Mitchell also makes use of a similar model in his work, *The Structure of International Conflict* (1981).

^[4] An encouraging measure of success was achieved in UNPA Western Slavonia from the spring of 1992 to the spring 1993 by linking Peacemaking, Peacekeeping, and

Peacebuilding and adopting a strategy of “peace pushing” from both the top down and from the ground up, coupled with economic and financial incentives to both the local Croatian and Serbian communities inside the UNPA. Unfortunately, after the rotation out of the mission of the UN Sector Civil Affairs Coordinator (Mr. Gerard Fischer) and the Military Sector Commander (Brig-Gen Carlos Zabala), this strategy was discontinued and the progress that had been achieved unraveled.

[5] Vaclav Havel and Joseph Brodsky, *Le Cauchemar du monde post-communiste*, Paris, Anatolia, 1994, p.24.