International Conflict Resolution

Conflicts can potentially cause societies to disintegrate, but at the same time they offer opportunities for social change. Understanding the causes of international conflict is no less important than identifying tools for its management and resolution, which are commonly organized into three categories: peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace building. Resolution of international conflicts reduces human suffering, strengthens the global community, and enhances sustainable development worldwide.

Peace and security create the necessary environment for sustainable social and economic development. Conflicts, depending on their severity and duration, can pose a serious threat to social and economic progress as well as to the environment. International conflict resolution helps break the conflict cycle and reestablish peace and security and so contributes to global sustainability.

Conflicts and the Environment

Conflicts are inherent in human relations and can occur between individuals or groups over issues such as religion, race, language, beliefs, values, identity, scarcity or unequal distribution of resources, contestation of central power, or colonized peoples' quest for self-determination. Human-needs theorists such as the Australian professor of conflict resolution John Burton claim that conflicts occur when certain fundamental human needs and desires are unmet (1990). These range from daily needs such as water and food to control over resources such as oil, forests, and arable and grazing lands.

Whereas before and during the Cold War the focus was on political differences, power relations, and interstate wars (Singer and Small 1972), in the post–Cold War era it was recognized that injustice and underdevelopment engender conflicts within and between states and so threaten international peace and security (Wallensteen 2007).

Conflicts are intricately connected with the environment and natural resources. The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP 2009) claims that although the environment is seldom the only cause of violent conflicts, it can trigger, amplify, or fuel them.

Environmental resources such as land, fish, water, timber, plants, and minerals are sources of medicine, food, and fundamental raw materials for production of basic goods and services, and hence is essential for social and economic growth. The environment—air, water bodies, and land—in turn receives, recycles, and purifies waste that results from the production and consumption of goods and services, and is essential in regulating climate change. If these resources become scarce as a result of population growth, unfair sharing, and degradation and if people cannot meet their needs because of failed social, economic, and political systems, conflicts might arise. The British economics professor Paul Collier and the British expert in African economics Anke Hoeffler argue that natural resources present profitable opportunities for rebel groups to fight over them (2002). Other scholars suggest that resource-rich countries are inclined to build centralized governance structures with the aim of controlling resources. This leads to power struggles to retain or acquire control over resources (Deacon and Mueller 2004). Conflict diamonds, often called blood diamonds, from the African countries of Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Angola or illegal timber from Indonesia-Aceh corroborate these claims (UNEP 2009).

In addition, people are sometimes displaced from their lands because of extraction operations and bear the brunt of environmental pollution from these operations. Collier

and Hoeffler postulate that if such people are inadequately compensated, grievances can accumulate and possibly lead to conflicts (2002). The same is true of people displaced from their lands because the lands are converted into parks and reserves to meet conservation needs. The displacement of the B'laan communities for gold mining in the Philippines is a good example (Gomez and Polinar 2012).

When conflicts break out, they wreak immense human suffering and loss of life, as well as often forcing people to migrate, sometimes across state borders. Displaced people can cause environmental degradation by cutting forests for construction material and fuel wood or to generate land for subsistence farming. This can lead to loss of biodiversity and soil erosion. The natural resource base on which livelihoods depend is thus compromised and could trigger new conflicts.

Additionally, conflicts discourage investment, and resources that would have been used for social and economic development are diverted to fund the conflicts and possibly extend their duration. The effects of bombs, land mines, and chemicals used during conflict can render lands unproductive, thereby compromising livelihoods long after the conflict has ended. Whereas failed political and social institutions cause conflicts, conversely, conflicts can exacerbate institutional problems. Postconflict reconstruction is usually costly.

If resources are of strategic importance, such as oil and uranium, they could be the object of interstate conflicts. Some natural resources, such as rivers, groundwater aquifers, oil fields, and migratory species of wildlife, do not respect state borders, making countries prone to interstate conflicts. Environmental pollution, too, knows no boundaries and creates a potential for both international and intergenerational conflict. Developing countries, for instance, argue that today's climate change is the result of greenhouse gas emissions that industrialized nations emitted during earlier phases of development. In this respect, the question of who should pay how much to mitigate and reduce dangerous climate change is fraught with conflict between states. These intra- and interstate dimensions of international conflicts, which hinder global sustainability, underscore the importance of international conflict resolution.

Conflict Resolution Efforts

International conflict resolution includes interventions geared toward reducing violence in international conflicts, reducing the chances of such conflicts resulting in violence, or establishing and reinforcing institutions for the peaceful expression of differences (Stern and Druckman 2002). The international community's toolbox for conflict resolution has evolved into three broad categories: peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peace building.

Peacemaking

Peacemaking includes activities to find a peaceful settlement to a conflict, such as coercive diplomacy, negotiation, official mediation, special envoys, arbitration, and litigation.

In *coercive diplomacy*, also called power politics or forceful persuasion, a powerful nation such as the United States or a coalition of countries such as the United Nations (UN) threatens to use force on a target state or other actor or to impose economic sanctions—or both—in order to dissuade conflict behavior. Economic sanctions can take the form of embargoing trade, halting foreign aid, or freezing a state's foreign assets. For instance, when Iraqi forces invaded Kuwait in 1990, the UN Security Council (UNSC) passed a resolution that placed an embargo on Iraqi imports and exports. When Iraq failed to comply, a US-led international coalition threatened military force and finally resorted to military intervention in 1991 to oust Iraqi forces from Kuwait (George 1991). Micah Sifry of the US-based Personal Democracy Foundation and the US author Christopher Cerf assert that the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was an attempt to gain control over oil reserves (1991). The effectiveness of economic sanctions is contested on the grounds that they affect not only the political rulers, but also the largely innocent civilian populations. Also, unilateral use of force could be illegitimate if not backed by the international community, as was expressed by worldwide protests against the US military intervention in Iraq before the second Gulf War in 2003.

Negotiation is the process whereby conflicting parties neutralize their differences through consensus. Here, interdependence over shared resources fosters cooperation rather than competition. An example is the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), a legally binding international environmental agreement aiming to protect global biological resources. The CBD accommodates the needs of different country parties. For instance, industrialized country parties agree to provide financial and technological resources to support conservation efforts in developing countries.

If parties to a conflict cannot reach agreement by negotiation, they might seek *mediation*. An eminent personality (the mediator) moderates discussions between conflicting parties and encourages them to come to an agreement, which is not legally binding on the parties. For example, in Kenya in 2007, former UN secretary-general Kofi Annan helped broker a power-sharing agreement that ended postelection violence in that country.

Contrary to mediation that brings conflict parties face-to-face, a *special envoy* sometimes acts as a go-between to facilitate communication between conflicting parties that cannot talk directly to each other and paves the way for negotiation. This is sometime called shuttle diplomacy. Special envoys can be highly respected persons such as diplomats, and they can act on behalf of international organizations such as the African Union (AU) or third governments. For instance, former Ghanaian president Jerry Rawlings is the current AU special envoy for Somalia and Somaliland.

Whereas diplomacy, negotiation, and mediation are based on consensus and are less costly in terms of time and financial resources, *arbitration* is a process in which conflicting parties appoint, by mutual agreement, a third party (arbitrator) to adjudicate an issue. Contrary to mediation, arbitration is adversarial and leads to a win-lose outcome that is binding on the parties. Sessions and decisions of arbitral tribunals are usually confidential, which permits parties to discuss sensitive issues easily. Arbitration is popular in solving economic and trade-related conflict; for instance, the appellate body of the World Trade Organization (WTO) acts as an arbitrator.

Litigation as a tool of international conflict resolution involves referring a conflict to an international court. Like arbitration, litigation is adversarial and results in one party being proven right and the other wrong. Proceedings are usually public, and the judges are not appointed by the parties to the particular conflict. For example, in conflicts over the interpretation of an international treaty, such as the CBD, the parties can refer the conflict to the International Court of Justice.

Peacekeeping

Where conflict escalates into violence, peacekeeping missions serve as a buffer between conflicting parties, contain the conflict, supervise demilitarization, and pave the way for negotiations. In the post–Cold War era, the role of peacekeeping missions expanded to include delivering humanitarian aid, disarmament, and security sector reform, as well as support to electoral processes. All peacekeeping missions are authorized by the UN Security Council and operationalized by the UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations. They are established with the consent of the conflicting parties, are impartial, and sanction force only in self-defense. Such missions comprise troops and police from different countries as well as civilian staff.

As an example, on 30 November 1999, UNSC Resolution 1279 established the United Nations Organization Mission (MONUC) in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to plan the observation of the Lusaka Ceasefire Agreement signed between the DRC and five other African countries. In a number of subsequent UNSC resolutions, the mandate of MONUC was expanded to monitor the implementation of the Ceasefire Agreement, contribute to the national program of disarmament, protect civilian populations and humanitarian workers, provide advice to the transitional government, assist in the electoral process, and prepare legal documents including a constitution. These efforts culminated in presidential and parliamentary elections in 2006. On 1 July 2010, MONUC was renamed the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the DRC (MONUSCO). It should be borne in mind that the conflict in the DRC has been linked with exploitation of natural resources, such as coltan (an ore from which elements fundamental to the electronics industry are extracted) (Hayes and Burge 2003). In this way, peacekeeping converges with peace building.

Peace Building

Peace building comprises activities such as rebuilding economic, political, and social institutions. Moreover, peace building is accompanied by provision of basic services, such as water, health care, and electricity, along with basic education and peace education. These help eradicate the underlying causes of conflict and prevent postconflict societies from relapsing into violence.

In recent times, problem-solving workshops and Track II (i.e., unofficial) diplomacy have gained prominence in international conflict resolution, especially in circumstances where differences are deep-seated and historical in nature. Unofficial third parties facilitate small discussion groups between members of conflicting parties.

These facilitators could be nongovernmental organizations, academics, journalists, activists, diplomats, or other eminent personalities. The meetings are informal and take place outside government channels even if members of governments are involved. The purpose is to brainstorm possible solutions and build confidence among conflicting parties. This technique is being applied, for instance, in finding a breakthrough in the ongoing India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir (Kaye 2005). Similarly, fact-finding missions and peace commissions are used in getting to the bottom of conflict causes. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission set up in South Africa after the first post-apartheid elections is a good example of the transitional justice process.

A discussion on international conflict resolution would be incomplete without noting the increasing role of international war crimes tribunals and the International Criminal Court (ICC). These are used to prosecute perpetrators of crimes against humanity, such as genocide and war crimes. For instance, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia was set up after the Balkan wars. Likewise, Slobodan Milosevic of the former Yugoslavia and Charles Taylor of Liberia are examples of former statesmen who have been tried at the ICC for war crimes. It is noteworthy that even as fear of repercussion by the ICC can deter parties from engaging in war, it can also be a reason to prolong the war, once already started; conflict parties might refrain from engaging in peace agreements because they fear trial by ICC once peace has been achieved.

Ready markets provided by transnational corporations could extend conflicts over natural resources by rebel groups. Initiatives that ensure that conflict resources do not enter the global market are thus an important component of international conflict resolution. For instance, the Kimberly Process Certification Scheme documents the origins of diamonds and thereby ensures that blood diamonds are not sold on the global diamond market. Additionally, the UN Global Compact provides codes of conduct for transnational corporations based on corporate social responsibility strategies (for instance, contributions made by transnational corporations such as building schools or health care units, providing scholarships, or making other donations to local communities in which they operate). Finally, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, which comprises private companies, governments, and civil society organizations, encourages companies to make payments public and governments to report revenue from natural resources. In this way, corruption and other socioeconomic malpractices are reduced and more funds are released for social and economic progress. These initiatives prevent grievances from accumulating and leading to conflicts.

Implications

Conflict can lead to social change, but prolonged conflict is unsustainable socially, ecologically, and economically. The importance of international conflict resolution in achieving global sustainable development therefore cannot be overemphasized.

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See also Afghanistan; Balkans; Central Asia; Climate Change Refugees (Africa); Conflict Minerals; Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo; Immigrants and Refugees; Middle East; Mining (Africa); Pakistan; Public-Private Partnerships (Africa); Rule of Law (Africa); Rule of Law (European Union); Transboundary Water Issues

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