

Multinational Cooperation and Intervention: Small Steps to Better Results

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ABSTRACT:

This article considers the political and practical challenges inherent in large-scale multinational interventions executed by western powers, aimed at addressing regional instability through the application of military power to provide or restore local security. Reflecting upon recent well-publicised instances of such interventions, some of which have delivered otiose and often disappointing outcomes, it explores the efficacy of more limited interventions targeted at very specific problems. The authors argue in favour of a different style of security intervention: tightly focused, developed locally, delivered in partnership with community stakeholders and elected representatives – an approach that is reliant upon the contribution made by expert practitioners drawn from a range of contributing nations. This style of intervention remains vulnerable to external interference and malign political influence. Nevertheless, it is a model of international cooperation tested and proven to work if a conducive environment for implementation is established with support from inter-governmental organisations.

ARTICLE INFO:

RECEIVED: 30 MAR 2021

REVISED: 27 MAY 2021

ONLINE: 31 MAY 2021

KEYWORDS:

security, intervention, multinational, cooperation



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Introduction

Through the latter years of the twentieth century and early years of the twenty-first century, there have been a number of high-profile multinational interventions by the international community in countries deemed to be sufficiently unstable to present a threat to global peace or, more controversially, to local populations. Beginning with the tardy but largely successful intervention in the Yugoslav civil war in 1990 and culminating in the soon to conclude intervention in Afghanistan after the Al Qaeda attacks on the USA in 2001, there have also been military interventions in Iraq in 2003 and Libya in 2011. The list is not exhaustive. There have been other interventions elsewhere, but these particular examples of military intervention mainly conducted by western powers provide illuminating insights into the success and, sometimes, the failure of such multinational security responses to perceived international threats.

Conflict and Collapse in the Balkans

Following the death in 1980 of Yugoslavia's communist dictator Marshall Tito, the country gradually began to descend into political infighting, instability and a gradual fragmentation along strong ethnic and religious divisions. With nationalist groups winning multi-party elections in 1990 after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the stage was set for a very violent break-up of the country. On 25 June 1991, the parliaments of Croatia and Slovenia declared independence, triggering war with Serbia. The Serbian/Croatian conflict endured for four years but even worse was to come. Bosnia Herzegovina, a far more ethnically diverse state, descended into a three-way conflict involving ethnic Croats, Serbs and Muslim Bosniaks. The state capital, Sarajevo, was under siege for 44 months, in which time at least 10,000 were killed in shelling and small arms fire.¹

Although the collapse of Yugoslavia into conflict and chaos did not immediately threaten any of the European North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) member countries, old ties and allegiances dating back to the Habsburg and Ottoman empires began to exert their influence. Germany was the first NATO member to recognise Croatian independence on 19 December 1991, further exacerbating existing regional tensions. After much procrastination among Europe's leaders and evidence of a growing number of atrocities taking place during the fighting, an end to the conflict was finally brought about by a NATO aerial bombing campaign in August 1995, followed by a US-brokered peace deal. Resolving the conflict through the more desirable route of a United Nations (UN) security council resolution was not regarded as a viable option due to historical links between communist Yugoslavia and the now defunct Soviet Union and still older ties between Orthodox Russia and Orthodox Serbia.² When the Serbian (and majority ethnic-Albanian) province of Kosovo broke away from Serbia in 1999, triggering another bout of intense fighting, a NATO military intervention neutralising the Serbian military followed a lot quicker.³

Whilst outside military (via NATO) intervention in the Balkan wars can be said to have been successful in stopping the conflict and bringing lasting peace and

democratic government to the region, for some in western Europe and the Balkan states themselves, the NATO actions had unpleasant echoes of previous great power imperialist interference and rivalries in the old Yugoslavia. Moreover, many citizens in European Union countries remembered all too well that NATO was established, among other things, to prevent the future bombing of a European capital city, not actually to organise and carry out such an attack. Nevertheless, military success in the Balkan wars of the 1990s proved difficult if not impossible to replicate in other areas of the globe such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Somalia.

Afghanistan: The Unwinnable War

Following the shock and horror of the Islamist terror group Al Qaeda's attack on targets in the USA in September 2001, the NATO powers launched a joint operation against the group's bases in Afghanistan and those of the Taliban regime that held sway over most of the country following the Soviet withdrawal in 1989. Initially, the operation was intended to neutralise the terrorist threat posed to the western powers by Al Qaeda. Whilst there was no specific UN Security Council resolution authorising military intervention in Afghanistan, it was universally accepted that the USA had a legal right to self-defence under UN article 51.⁴ However, over time and perhaps with insufficient regard to the Russian experience of intervening in the country, the remit of this military intervention conducted by the United States and her allies expanded greatly to become a wide-ranging nation-building enterprise. Since that first military deployment in 2001, 2,300 American service personnel have lost their lives⁵ in the country, with another 20,000 receiving injuries. There have been 456 British service personnel killed in the same period.⁶ With Afghanistan still politically unstable and still enduring a Taliban insurgency in 2021, western leaders must wonder what benefits they and their citizens have accrued from such a lengthy and costly deployment. From that initial tightly defined military mission back in 2001, the western presence in Afghanistan has sought to develop a new (western) system of education and to inculcate local people with western liberal notions of gender equality and human rights. Commenting on the NATO intervention in the Balkans in the 1990s, Allin observes that

After the traumas inflicted upon these societies, it would be facile to suggest that the protecting powers can organise functioning states based on Western ideals of multi-ethnic tolerance any time in the foreseeable future.⁷

So true, except that this self-evident fact apparently escaped the notice of all the diplomats, military leaders and policymakers that the western powers deployed to Afghanistan. A 2019 article in the *New York Times*⁸ posed the question: what did the US get for \$2 Trillion in Afghanistan? The article noted the billions of dollars spent on countering narcotics production, infrastructure development, education and training programmes, the training of soldiers and police officers; yet, after all that expenditure (of borrowed money), Afghanistan still produces around 80 % of global opium supplies, the army and police are

unable to provide a basic level of security, and the majority of Afghan citizens still live in grinding poverty. By any yardstick, the American-led intervention in Afghanistan—aimed to improve both regional and global security—has ended in disappointment and failure.

The Difficult Path to Police Reform

Of course, it could be fairly argued that the challenges posed by the situation in Afghanistan (and perhaps less so in Iraq) demanded a large-scale military intervention and that nothing less could have been reasonably contemplated by the international community. That may be so, but after the initial military campaign, in both cases a more limited and light-touch approach could have delivered different results. To go from a complete absence of anything that might resemble to western eyes a functioning modern police service to what has become the Afghan National Police (ANP), a large and very imperfect organisation, required a vast effort by nations involved in reconstructing Afghanistan.⁹ As has been pointed out elsewhere,¹⁰ policing cannot operate as a stand-alone institution. Effective policing requires the support of an independent judiciary, state prosecutors, an official inspectorate or oversight body, a strong civil society and robust free press to hold the service to account, as well as political support, free from interference in operational decision making. These things are challenging to provide in wealthy and developed countries and almost impossible to provide elsewhere. So it is reasonable to ask why it was ever seen as a realistic proposition to establish a western-style policing organisation in a war-torn and unstable country like Afghanistan. Strengthening and supporting traditional systems of social control might have proved to be more effective. Still, it would have required international policymakers to abandon any semblance of ideological input and simply aim for a modest improvement in local security.

Success or Failure: How Multinational Security Initiatives Can Succeed

By acknowledging the enormous challenges inherent in large-scale multinational interventions and the difficulties in delivering tangible and lasting improvements to safety and security for local populations, international policymakers may shift the focus of their attention and collective efforts towards more limited initiatives. Such an approach would, almost inevitably, leave some problems unresolved. It might also lead to continuing instability and ongoing conflict. However, it could and should be argued that some improvement in security is preferable to no improvement and that longer time frames (and probably, bigger budgets) could still lead to permanent improvements and sustainable development. There are certainly examples of multinational security initiatives that have demonstrated great promise showcasing international and multi-agency cooperation and multinational joint working that have been established around some fairly modest goals. Rather than the grand strategy interventions that can so easily come adrift in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, more locally-focused programmes of work, that are tightly defined and aimed at resolving a very specific problem, would seem to offer a far greater

chance of success. The case study outlined below provides an illuminating example of how this approach can work. No great claims are being made here about transferability or how such a programme could be replicated in other areas or jurisdictions; this is simply intended to illustrate what can be achieved.

The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is a vast multinational security organisation with 57 member states, including Russia, the USA and all 27 member states of the European Union.

The OSCE traces its origins to the *détente* phase of the early 1970s, when the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) was created to serve as a multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiation between East and West. Meeting over two years in Helsinki and Geneva, the CSCE reached agreement on the Helsinki Final Act, which was signed on 1 August 1975. This document contained a number of key commitments on politico-military, economic, environmental and human rights issues that became central to the so-called 'Helsinki process'. It also established ten fundamental principles (the 'Decalogue') governing the behaviour of States towards their citizens, as well as towards each other. Until 1990, the CSCE functioned mainly as a series of meetings and conferences that built on and extended the participating States' commitments, while periodically reviewing their implementation. However, with the end of the Cold War, the Paris Summit of November 1990 set the CSCE on a new course. In the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the CSCE was called upon to play its part in managing the historic change taking place in Europe and responding to the new challenges of the post-Cold War period, which led to its acquiring permanent institutions and operational capabilities. As part of this institutionalisation process, the name was changed from the CSCE to the OSCE by a decision of the Budapest Summit of Heads of State or Government in December 1994.¹¹

One of the specific functions of the OSCE was the promotion of human rights throughout the OSCE region. To deliver on this objective, the OSCE established an Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The ODIHR too was sub-divided into different departments for delivering on particular areas of work. One of these was a sub-unit titled Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. The sub-unit consisted of a small team of people drawn from across member states, most with a background in non-governmental organisations (NGOs), working to improve the lives of various minority or persecuted groups. Some team members had specific skills either as human rights lawyers or legal advocates.

In early 2005, the Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Desk teamed up with a New Jersey-based consultancy called the National Public Safety Strategy Group. Working together and in collaboration with NGOs and subject matter experts from across Europe, they produced a training curriculum for combatting hate crime aimed at law enforcement officers from across the OSCE region. As a crime phenomenon, hate crime was not new. However, con-

ceptually the evolution of an appropriate and effective law-enforcement response was both radical and new with the realisation across police organisations throughout the OSCE that a more robust and targeted approach was needed to reduce the incidence of hate crimes which were often motivated by longstanding inter-ethnic, religious, cultural, national and political enmities that had in some cases been centuries in the making. The intention behind this new initiative, dubbed the Law Enforcement Officer Programme for Combatting Hate Crime (LEOP-CHC), was to induct a picked team of police trainers drawn from OSCE member states to deliver the training programme in any OSCE country that identified a need for such training and extended an invitation to the LEOP team to come to the national police academy and deliver the training course for trainers.

The programme began in earnest in April 2005 when ODIHR officials convened a meeting at their headquarters in Warsaw, Poland. Invited were police officer representatives from Canada, France, Hungary, Spain and Great Britain. Also in attendance were experts and academics from the USA and Great Britain. The initial cohort of attending police officers was intended to form the nucleus of the training delivery team. The attendees had been selected and assigned to the project by their respective governments: interior or police ministries. This was, in fact, a seminal moment that was likely to influence the success or failure of the programme from the very outset. At this key point, the entire initiative could have foundered. Bringing together a rather random selection of police officials from different countries with very different police organisations and professional cultures, not to mention national cultures and languages, was, to say the least, a high-risk gamble. The potential for almost immediate disagreements, inter-service rivalries, personal and professional antagonisms as well as general misunderstandings was considerable.

In fact, something very different occurred. The assembled group bonded almost straight away. A strong and collegiate working relationship evolved which further developed into deep and lasting friendships between all the participating officers. This may have been due to simple luck, or to the professionalism of those involved, or to the careful selection of those put forward to attend. Perhaps all those dynamics were at play; nevertheless, it was and remains an exceptional example of international cooperation on a hugely complex and vital aspect of international law enforcement and crime prevention. The excellent working relationship that developed in the training team soon led to successful efforts to encourage the uptake of the programme in the police academies where the training was piloted and rolled out. Trust between officers was quickly established, and this high level of trust encouraged participants to take some bold initiatives. This included inviting community groups, gay rights campaigners, religious minorities, women's groups and others to come into the training sessions to share their stories, accounts of past injustices, their fears and concerns and their criticisms of the police. These sessions provided hugely powerful learning experiences for the assembled police officers and provided some, often uncomfortable, feedback direct from the citizens. This entire pro-

cess was strengthened considerably by the honesty and candour of police officers from the UK, France, Canada and the USA (drawn from the core group of LEOP trainers), sharing personal accounts of poor practice and unprofessional behaviour in their own organisations that had resulted in police failures.

It is a sad fact that having created something so strong and potentially so successful, over subsequent years, the ODIHR set about consistently undermining and ultimately destroying the very programme that they had so painstakingly put together. The precise reasons for this remain unclear, but it is reasonable to infer from later events that international politics, personal prejudices and internal power struggles all contributed to the ultimate demise of the project.

The rollout of the training programme began in May 2005 with delivery in two pilot sites, the Crime Prevention Academy in Budapest, Hungary and the National Police Academy in Madrid, Spain. These pilot training sessions aimed to prove the concept, refine and further develop the curriculum, and test out the working dynamics of the newly formed cadre of police trainers. The pilot training sessions were a success, and the new programme was now offered more widely to member states. The detailed programme stages of the project consisted of:

- A consultation with major stakeholders to the programme, including government officials, police leaders (senior command and front-line officers), NGOs and representatives of affected communities;
- This was followed by a detailed orientation phase involving senior staff from strategic areas of the police service to identify relevant current national legislation, capacities to respond to and investigate hate crimes, and challenges as well as opportunities facing programme implementation;
- From here would develop a customised training curriculum for each participating state, based upon specific needs as identified through project consultation and the orientation phases;
- Design and delivery of a train-the-trainer programme for each participating state would follow with input from designated stakeholders, including trainers and learners;
- This would be incorporated into training manuals, handouts, and multimedia presentation tools;
- Finally, there would be a provision of post-training support through the ODIHR website, including the sharing of best practices from other jurisdictions, as well as training-relevant resources and tools.

Of course, the actual adoption and implementation of the LEOP-CHC training package and associated policy changes was something that had to proceed through numerous political and diplomatic filters in each of the participating states. The OSCE operates through a system of unanimous agreement among member states before action can be taken. Such an approach places an immediate brake upon the scope and range of interventions that the organisation can

implement. It is a tribute to all those involved that the LEOP programme was successfully delivered and embedded in Croatia, Bosnia and Poland. Tentative steps were made to introduce the programme in Ukraine, Serbia, the Czech Republic, North Macedonia and Romania. Training seminars to support the expansion and promulgation of the training policy doctrine and training approach were held in Toronto, Paris, London and Warsaw. However, by the end of 2009, the initiative had stalled, and the training team was abruptly abandoned.

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reasons why the success of this programme was so short-lived and why the ODIHR took the decision to abandon it just as it was gaining support and momentum. The most likely reasons are depressingly familiar. A change in the leadership at the ODIHR brought in new people to key posts. Individuals from different member states with different ideas and, no doubt, a desire to establish their own ideas and initiatives. One of the key strengths of the LEOP-CHC strategy was that it utilised police professionals to encourage and develop the professional knowledge and understanding of their colleagues in police organisations and academies across the OSCE region. As mentioned above, most of the ODIHR staff were drawn from NGOs and activist groups. For many of these people, the police were a problem, and outside intervention from enlightened western liberals was needed to re-educate the police and correct their professional shortcomings. The obvious weakness in this approach, and one that the LEOP method was designed to avoid, is that very quickly police officers become resistant to outside interference and hostile to implied criticism from those who have no knowledge or understanding of the challenges inherent in the policing profession, wherever it is conducted. New staff at the ODIHR began the process again, developing a training programme called Training Against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement (TAHCLE)¹² in 2009, which is still being used today. This drew on expertise provided by a different set of academics and civil society experts but sought to achieve the same basic goals.

Conclusions

It would be unfair and inaccurate to claim that international interventions, often by a coalition of the willing, either through authority granted by a UN security council resolution or without one, always result in further instability and loss of life. The NATO intervention to halt ethnic conflicts in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s is a case in point. One could argue that action could have been taken sooner and that too much effort was expended in trying to propitiate Serb militants; nevertheless, it is a self-evident fact that the Balkan republics that have emerged from the wreckage of communist Yugoslavia are now stable democratic and reasonably prosperous countries. The same, unfortunately, cannot be said of Afghanistan or Iraq, Somalia or Libya. In all four of these countries, the people continue to suffer in poverty, corruption, political instability, human rights abuses and an absence of even basic levels of security. What seems certain is that despite the mobilisation of immense political, social and economic effort, the positive outcomes accruing from international interventions in the

world's trouble spots are often extremely nebulous and difficult to discern. There is a tendency amongst many western politicians to reach for the grand strategic plan, a hugely ambitious programme of work intended to alleviate a vast range of political and societal problems. On occasion, such an approach may work, may indeed be essential to restore regional or global stability. However, in democratic countries, voter resistance, if not outright hostility to such largescale interventions, may cause political leaders to pause for thought. Of course, the compulsion to act, to execute the grand strategic move, may on occasions become politically irresistible. Nevertheless, wise counsel would and should encourage a more carefully calibrated approach. A lot can be achieved with a limited budget, carefully targeted intervention and positive collaboration between international experts and supportive local stakeholders. The case study outlined above provides a glimmer of what can be positively achieved and successfully delivered for vulnerable communities exposed to crime and insecurity. Law enforcement professionals consciously sitting outside the arena of domestic or international politics can and have worked successfully together on complex and wide-ranging security challenges. Collaboration with local stakeholders through, where necessary, the evolution of careful trust-building measures is an essential prerequisite for successful policy interventions. It is a fact that few countries outside of NATO have either the capacity or capability to project military force globally. As a consequence, most UN-sanctioned military expeditions are conducted by a coalition of the willing, all too often composed of the USA and its closest allies. As illustrated above, these interventions can result in positive and tangible improvements in community security and public safety. To work in an enduring and sustainable way, this type of intervention must be supported by seamless on-the-ground work programmes that involve a range of different actors, from the international community; soldiers, police officers, diplomats and civil servants. From the local community, a wide range of state officials, as well as political leaders, civil society organisations, and individual citizens need to be included. Importantly, funding allocations must be appropriate to the task and budgets maintained long enough to embed permanent change.

Postscript

Since the end of the LEOP-CHC programme in 2009, the team members have remained in contact and continued to work collaboratively on various police training missions across the globe. In 2021 they published a new book on police reform: James J. Nolan, Frank Crispino, and Timothy Parsons, *Policing in an Age of Reform: An Agenda for Research and Practice* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank all the members of the original OSCE/ODIHR LEOP programme training team. They would also like to extend their thanks and appreciation to the ODIHR Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Team members in 2005-09, including Jo-Anne Bishop, Daniel Milo, and ODIHR director Ambassador Christian Strohal.

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