6

Constructing the ‘Cosmopolitan-Minded’ National Military

6.1 Introduction

The final chapter of the book examines the prospects for the pursuit of cosmopolitan security goals by national militaries. As the previous chapter suggests, the UN has been a fertile site for the development of more sophisticated military concepts for civilian protection and human security goals. However, in a world of sovereign states, and with no independent military capacity, UN peacekeeping is often beset by lack of consensus on key issues and the influence of national interest.

In the absence of a UN standing force, it is more likely that ‘cosmopolitan-minded’ national militaries will be the candidates to assume future cosmopolitan security roles. Buchanan and Keohane (2004: 17–22) argue that the shortcomings of the existing UN system and the limited realistic potential for change make a coalition of liberal democratic states, most likely Western in origin, the most feasible vehicle for preventing large-scale abuses of human rights. Encouragingly, what has become evident since the end of World War Two and particularly since the end of the Cold War, is the gradual cosmopolitanisation of certain national militaries. Contributions to UN peacekeeping, acting to protect vulnerable non-citizens, or helping to provide the initial foundations for the alleviation of structural violence through peacebuilding, provide some indication of this process. At the same time, these militaries also retain important traditional responsibilities for defence of their state’s territory, population and national interest. Thus, it is at the intersection between cosmopolitan objectives and the national interest that the process of cosmopolitanisation has taken
place, and much hinges on the extent to which the two can be reconciled consistently.

Both traditionally internationalist middle powers and Western states noted for their capabilities in expeditionary warfighting have made varying transitions in this respect. In both cases, however, these transitions have encountered important limitations. A favourable balance between traditional and cosmopolitan roles appears to have been struck by Canada and Sweden, reflected by their regular contribution to UN peace operations. However, their seemingly advanced level of cosmopolitan-mindedness has been constrained by their own uneasy involvement in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and the declining levels of direct commitment to UN peace operations. Perhaps surprisingly, given their protracted involvement in the exclusionary practices of the War on Terror during the 2000s, adaptations in the US and UK national military doctrine during this same period reveal approaches to soldiering that could be characterised as an emergent cosmopolitan-minded approach. As a potentially positive legacy of War on Terror counter-insurgency, the development of ‘postmodern’ military techniques for stabilisation and civilian protection operations provides some possible indicators of a cosmopolitan approach to soldiering. However, these doctrinal approaches expose an important tension. This centres on whether cosmopolitan-minded roles are seen as first- or second-order tasks and whether they are unbalanced by a strong retained commitment to warfighting capabilities.

The second section explores the legacy of the War on Terror and the impact of the post-2008 Global Economic Crisis on the way cosmopolitan commitments have come to be actioned by Western militaries. The notion of enlightened national interest and the subsequent shifts in military doctrine have the potential to change the purposes for which national militaries are used and the way in which they operate. However, these changes have occurred in a period where the appetite for cosmopolitan-minded military action within the US and the UK in particular, appears to have declined. The twin influences of fiscal austerity across the West, combined with exceptionally low levels of public support for armed military interventions overseas, have led to the emergence of a more reluctant, remote and risk averse form of cosmopolitan-like practice. Demonstrating very similar characteristics to the concept of Low-Intensity Warfare that was a prominent feature of US foreign policy during the 1980s, recent attempts to protect civilians overseas have manifested themselves in more non-committal forms of action based on air strikes and the use of local proxies.