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The Management of Inter-State Conflict

The management of inter-state conflict, which for so long has preoccupied debates between neorealists and neoliberals, remains of fundamental importance to the contemporary European order. It is necessary, however, to restate the significance of inter-state conflict as the end of the Cold War has both ‘lifted’ the East–West confrontation from Europe and led to a new focus on intra-state conflict. The tragedy in the former Yugoslavia became the centre of attention rather than the patterns of conflict and cooperation between states in the new Europe. This chapter seeks to redress this balance and consider the role of international institutions in the maintenance of security and stability between states. The chapter will address the role of international institutions in managing the conflicts of their member states and the ‘outreach’ of such organizations to stabilize the wider European political space.

Institutional types and settings

To date we have briefly intimated the differences between those international institutions composed of ‘like-minded states’ such as NATO or the EU and those with an ‘open membership’ such as the OSCE. We have suggested that the identities of interest in the former lend themselves to institutional regulation in a manner that is often denied to organizations reflecting more diverse constituencies. A more precise typology of institutions has been offered by Wallander and Keohane in terms of commonality, specificity and differentiation (Wallander and Keohane, 1999, p. 24). Commonality is defined as ‘the degree to which expectations about appropriate behaviour are shared by participants’ (ibid., p. 24). Specificity refers to the degree to which specific and enduring rules exist, governing the practices of officials, obligations of states and legitimate procedures.
for changing collective policy’ (ibid., p. 24). Functional differentiation refers to ‘the extent to which the institutions assign different roles to different members’ (ibid., p. 24). Wallander and Keohane also suggest that security institutions vary according to their inclusivity or exclusivity. Collective security institutions are seen as inclusive ‘since they are designed to deal with threats among members’ (ibid., p. 26). Alliances are ‘exclusive because they deter and defend against external threats’ (ibid., p. 26). Exclusive strategies are seen to be ‘better suited to coping with threats, while inclusive strategies appear to be better able to cope with and manage risks’ (ibid., p. 26).

The capacity of international institutions to adapt to a changing international environment is seen as a product of institutionalization and ‘portability’. Highly institutionalized coalitions of states are seen as more likely to persist, ‘since the marginal costs of maintaining existing institutions are smaller than the average costs of new ones’ (ibid., p. 33). ‘Portability’ is defined as ‘the ease with which the rules and practices of one institution can be adapted to other situations’ (ibid., p. 34). Institutions that ‘combine a variety of functions are more likely than narrowly focused institutions to find that some of their rules and practices are more portable: the fact that they have a variety of rules and organizational repertoires means that some of these rules and repertoires are more likely to remain relevant after sudden environmental change occurs’ (ibid., p. 34). In this sense NATO has successfully adapted from its Cold War role due to its degree of both institutionalization and portability. For Wallander and Keohane NATO is a hybrid institution combining ‘risk-directed management functions with threat-directed power aggregation functions …’ (ibid., p. 34). It is arguable that in some measure NATO always combined these elements, helping to manage the conflicts of its members as well as responding to the Soviet threat. It is in the new Europe, however, that NATO’s hybrid role has been clarified, not least in its revisions to the Strategic Concept in 1999. NATO is not yet though a fully inclusive security management institution dealing only with risks. It still retains collective defence functions and, while seeking to engage Moscow in a new partnership, it still provides security insurance for its members. The dual functions of the Alliance – the degree to which it manages the conflicts of its members and its external role – to stabilize the wider Europe will be analysed below.

The security environment is also clearly pertinent to the relevance and functions of international institutions. The security environment is a key to understanding the security dilemma and the significance to states of relative and absolute gains. The European security order has profoundly