

The OSCE and Cooperative Security

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There is an obvious temptation to derive the contemporary understanding of the concept of the Cooperative Security and that of the indivisibility of security from the early documents of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), i.e. to assert that both served as an underlying basis of the 1975 CSCE Helsinki Final Act. This is not exactly true.

A reference to the 'indivisibility of security', indeed, finds itself in the Final Act. But its reading remained disputed for a long time. Western countries and a few in the Eastern Block (particularly Romania) asserted that the Helsinki principles were to apply not only in relations between East and West but also within the Eastern Block, thus implicitly renouncing the 'Brezhnev doctrine' which justified military intervention in order to prevent the erosion of the Soviet domination of East Central Europe.

This proposition was never tested but the concept of indivisibility of security (or of *détente*) served as a point of reference after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. This time the controversy focused on the issue of whether security in Europe was separable from that in other parts of the world, i.e. whether the CSCE participating states were bound to observe the Helsinki principles only in relations with each other or with other nations, as well.

Both interpretations were contested by the Soviet Union and were never spelled out in the CSCE documents. The debate over the indivisibility of security, however, already at an early point was focused on the indiscriminate implementation of the Helsinki principles and commitments within the entire CSCE area. This became very much the focus of the concept of Cooperative Security over the past two decades.

There was no notion of Cooperative Security in the CSCE documents until 1992, when the Helsinki summit called for establishing new security relations among the participating states 'based upon co-operative and common approaches to security'.

This notion should not be mixed with the concept of cooperation during the Cold War. The latter was described in the 1967 Harmel Report and suggested that further development of the NATO defense posture should not prevent political consultation and economic cooperation with the adversary Soviet Block. Limited East-West cooperation during the Cold War, however, was not supposed to replace confrontation or to curb the arms race but, rather, was expected to help in reducing the imminent risks thereof.

The Soviet doctrine of the 'reduction of international tensions' entailed similar policy implications which, in the end, made *détente* and the CSCE process possible.

Concepts of Cooperative Security

The Cooperative Security concept was introduced only after the end of the Cold War. It reflected a shift in the defense and security policy towards greater emphasis of multilateralism in order to transcend unilateral or alliance based action that would not exclude coercion or enforcement of specific policy goals. The concept was introduced by a group of American scholars² in 1992. As put by one of the authors, Ashton Carter, it was supposed to provide 'a new organizing principle for thinking about the world and how to act in it'³.

2 A. B. Carter, J. D. Steinbruner and W. J. Perry. *A New Concept of Cooperative Security*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992.

3 A. B. Carter, J. D. Steinbruner and W. J. Perry. *A New Concept of Cooperative Security*, Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1992.

While the Harmel Report encouraged cooperation to complement, not to replace the military competition of the Cold War adversaries, Cooperative Security was aimed exactly at transcending the latter. Starting with the principle that defense of national territory was the only legitimate purpose of national military forces, it sought to prevent states from assembling or using the means for an offensive by committing them to regulate and to keep transparent to each other the size, technical composition, investment patterns and operational practices of all military forces by mutual consent.

The Cooperative Security concept would not stop at encouraging confidence building and arms control but would seek to expand cooperation to other relevant areas. Multiple projects launched in the 1990s, such as the Cooperative Threat Reduction, or the G8 sponsored Global Partnership in preventing the spread of weapons of mass destruction continue representing sustainable Cooperative Security practices.

The past two decades witnessed proliferation of the Cooperative Security vocabulary. It became fashion and could not avoid inflation. However, it revealed a remarkable evolution from seeking mutual security reassurance through an increasingly multilateral action grounded in consensus, law, international institutions and regimes to respond to new security threats⁴. It penetrated military establishments which adapted the concept for the purpose of developing a more integrated policy to enhance regional stability and prevent or mitigate crises.⁵ It would not be fair to assert, however, that the concept was equally

understood and fully shared by everyone, or consistently followed through within the Organization for security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) area. The unilateralism versus multilateralism debate over the US policy, particularly during the past two American administrations, highlighted the highly complex reality of interference of competing security approaches.

The Cooperative Security concept never got deeply rooted in the Russian security policy thinking either. To a large extent, Moscow continued to follow traditional policy approaches despite finding it increasingly difficult to reconcile the residual great power ambition with the dramatically shifting global and regional distribution of power.

The Russian government endorsed numerous documents, not least within the OSCE, using the Cooperative Security language. It never declined from accepting the benefits the Cooperative Security policy offered it. However, it never internalized the concept itself. The Russian foreign and security policy doctrines neither mention Cooperative Security, nor do they resort to its vocabulary. They rather define security in terms of a 'reasonable balance of interest of multiple international actors'.⁶

The latter concept reflects the mainstream Russian understanding of multilateralism as institutionalizing a 'concert' of the leading 'responsible' nations serving the purpose of improving cooperation among them and

4 See, i.e.: C. Conetta, *Terrorism, World Order, and Cooperative Security*. A research and policy development agenda. Project on Defense Alternatives Briefing Memo # 24, 9 September 2002. Available at: <http://www.comw.org/pda/0209coopsec.html>.

5 According to the US Department of Defense, Cooperative Security is a 'set of continuous, long-term, integrated, comprehensive actions among a broad spectrum of US and international governmental and nongovernmental partners that maintains or enhances stability, prevents or mitigates crises, and enables other operations when crises occur. The military contribution to these efforts focuses on mobilizing cooperation and building relationships to enhance regional security'. *Military Contribution to Cooperative Security*,

6 *Joint Operating Concept*, Version 1.0, Washington, DC: DoD, 19 September 2008, p. 1. The Preamble to: *Obzor vneshney politiki Rossiiskoy Federatsii (The Russian Federation Foreign Policy Review)*, published on 27 March 2007. Available at: <http://www.mid.ru/ns-osndoc.nsf/0e9272bafa34209743256c630042d1aa/d925d1dd235d3ec7c32573060039aea4?Op enDocument>.

establishing mutually accepted rules governing and reducing their competition. Such a ‘concert’ is supposed to be based on a bargain over ‘sheer interests’ rather than on common values⁷. Decisions and policies which don’t find Russian approval are not considered cooperative.

Intellectually, Moscow’s interpretation of Cooperative Security did not move far beyond where it was in the late 1980s when the two superpowers considered enforcing international order in a sort of condominium⁸. Politically, it did not yet adjust to the world in which the Russo–US cooperation (or competition) is no longer central to the international order.

The OSCE and Collective Security

The OSCE not only echoed the general evolution of the Cooperative Security concept, it was expected to organically grow on the basis of the comprehensive Cooperative Security approach. The latter manifested itself in three major ways.

Firstly, ‘encouraged by the opportunities for new co-operative approaches to strengthening security offered by the historic changes and by the process of consolidation of democracy in the CSCE community of States’, the Organization sought to ‘promote increased predictability’ about military plans, programmes and capabilities of the participating states as well as ‘consultation and co-operation in respect of challenges to their security from outside their territories’⁹.

For this purpose, the OSCE Forum for Security Cooperation was set up in 1992 in order to start new negotiations on arms control, disarmament and confidence- and security-building, to enhance regular consultation, to intensify cooperation on matters related to security, and to further the process of reducing the risk of conflict.

The OSCE did not stop at arms control but developed a vision of greater conversion and integration of security policies of its participating states. In 1994, the Budapest Summit Declaration envisaged that the Organization ‘will be a forum where concerns of participating States are discussed, their security interests are heard and acted upon. We will further enhance its role as an instrument for the integration of these States in resolving security problems. Through the CSCE, we will build a genuine security partnership among all participating States, whether or not they are members of other security organizations’.

In the 1999 Charter of European Security the OSCE went further in admitting the possibility of developing a sort of quasi-alliance by promising to ‘consult promptly (...) with a participating State seeking assistance in realizing its right to individual or collective self-defence in the event that its sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence are threatened. We will consider jointly the nature of the threat and actions that may be required in defence of our common values’.

Secondly, the OSCE sought to ensure closer cooperation of different security organizations within the OSCE

7 A. Zagorski, Multilateralism in Russian foreign policy approaches, in E. Wilson Rowe and S. Torjesen (eds), *The Multilateral Dimension in Russian Foreign Policy*, London; New York: Routledge, 2009, pp. 47–48.

8 As reflected, *inter alia*, in I.W. Zartman and V.A. Kremenyuk (eds), *Cooperative Security: Reducing Third World Wars*, New York: Syracuse University Press, 1995

9 The 1992 Helsinki decisions

area. For this purpose, the 1999 Istanbul Summit Meeting approved the Platform for Cooperative Security with the goal ‘to strengthen the mutually reinforcing nature of the relationship between those organizations and institutions concerned with the promotion of comprehensive security within the OSCE area’.

Finally, while developing the Cooperative Security concept, the OSCE sought a comprehensive approach embracing all its three dimensions: ‘Our approach is one of co-operative security based on democracy, respect for human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, market economy and social justice. It excludes any quest for domination. It implies mutual confidence and the peaceful settlement of disputes¹⁰.¹⁰

Two features of the OSCE particularly shaped its profile as a Cooperative Security organization. Without having a mandate to take any enforcement measures, it had no other choice than to rely on good faith of the participating states. At the same time, apart from keeping them accountable, the Organization offered the participating states assistance in improving their record of implementation of the OSCE commitments.

Rendering assistance represented not the single but the dominant part of the mandates of different institutions and field mission of the OSCE. Their record of meeting the needs of individual countries is long and reaches from compiling the registers of voters in Albania in the late 1990s over helping Tajikistan to develop an effective system of border management, to destroy surplus ammunition, small arms and light weapons and to clear landmines, through assisting Ukraine in disposing of a highly toxic and volatile rocket fuel component known as melange— the largest donor-financed OSCE project so far launched in November 2009.

Despite obvious progress in many areas and regions, it would not be fair to assert that the OSCE succeeded in irreversibly anchoring the Cooperative Security concept. A December 2009 Declaration of the OSCE Ministerial Meeting in the Athens leaves no doubt that the participating states are yet far from obtaining this goal as:

- The principles of the Helsinki Final Act and OSCE commitments are not fully respected and implemented;
- The use of force has not ceased to be considered as an option in settling disputes;
- The danger of conflicts between States has not been eliminated, and armed conflicts have occurred even in the last decades;
- Tensions still exist and many conflicts remain unresolved;
- Stalemates in conventional arms control require urgent action and
- Achievements in the fields of the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms yet need to be fully safeguarded and further advanced.

Has the OSCE failed in anchoring Cooperative Security in Europe?

The record of practicing Cooperative Security within the OSCE is at best ambiguous. It is far below the expectations of the early 1990s when, after the adoption of the Charter of Paris for a new Europe, there was a widespread illusion that the Organization could soon become a community of values.

¹⁰ 1996 Lisbon Declaration on a common and comprehensive security model for Europe for the twenty-first century

It was naïve to believe that the task was easy to accomplish or that the process of internalizing common values would be fast and uncontroversial. Indeed, almost every single country which the OSCE institutions or missions sought to cooperatively assist in implementing political reforms developed a sort of assistance fatigue. Many were reluctant and sought to either deny or at least to reduce their cooperation with the OSCE to implementing technical assistance projects while avoiding to address politically sensitive issues.

Some countries, particularly the Russian Federation, claim that the OSCE has failed to become a forum where their concerns are discussed, security interests heard and acted upon. Rightly or wrongly, particularly against the background of the continuous NATO enlargement, they claim that the OSCE has failed to effectively integrate all participating states in resolving security problems and to build a genuine security partnership.


Still, large parts of Europe, East and West, have grown closer together over the past two decades. They did so primarily through joining NATO and/or the European Union, but the OSCE played an important role in cooperatively assisting this process. It still does so particularly with regard to its participating states in South Eastern Europe.

At the same time, large parts of the OSCE area and particularly many newly independent states of the former Soviet Union, including the Russian Federation, took a different path which, especially during the last decade, was marked by increasing political divergence rather than convergence with the rest of the OSCE family. It would be unrealistic to believe that the gap that has grown over the past years is likely to close any time soon.

This development highlights the limits of the Cooperative Security concept and particularly of the organization that has no means to enforce its values and relies on the cooperation of the participating states. However, it does not necessarily imply an ultimate failure. It means that the mission of anchoring the Cooperative Security within the OSCE is not yet accomplished. It also means that its accomplishment is going to take longer, and that the road towards building a genuine security community is going to be thornier than initially expected.

It would be wrong to conclude, however, that the ambitious goal of building a security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok would be easier to obtain without the OSCE or through a different organization. At least for the simple reason that it would be naïve to believe that a different institution including the same participating states could produce very different results from what the OSCE has so far achieved.

Learning from the recent failures and setbacks, the OSCE would embark on the wrong road if it decided to abandon the ambition of anchoring its comprehensive aqis all through the entire OSCE area and would reduce itself to administering technical assistance to the reluctant participating states upon their request. This would deprive the Organization not only of its unique mission and competence but most likely also of large parts of funding which would be successfully contested by other professional technical assistance agents operating on this market and bearing no political legacy.



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Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

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