THE US PLACE AND ROLE AS A GLOBAL PEACEKEEPER AND PEACEBUILDER: HISTORY AND PROSPECTS IN CHANGING GLOBAL GEOPOLITICAL LANDSCAPE

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Abstract
The paper discusses the US place and role in global peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding processes. First, it traces the transformation of US strategic perception regarding peacekeeping and peacebuilding from 1991 to 2022. Second, on the example of Desert Storm, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria, it reveals the US approaches to the peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding processes at the practical level. Finally, the paper explores potential scenarios for US engagement in the South Caucasus and particularly, in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, based on US strategic approaches and their practical implications. The paper argues that given the current political, geopolitical, and security landscape in the world and South Caucasus, the most realistic scenario may be the US direct diplomatic engagement with major support to the EU mission in Armenia.

Introduction

The changing global geopolitical landscape comprehensively impacts major power politics in various parts of the world. This leads to rising confrontation on global, regional, and local levels, driving the rise of multiple conflicts in the periphery.

The Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict is one of those conflicts, which heated up and erupted into the 44-day war in the autumn of 2020, when the whole world was dealing with the Covid pandemic, on the one hand, and world order transformations, on the other.

Though the war was stopped by the Trilateral Statement of the Presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan, and the Prime Minister of Armenia, followed by the placement of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, in fact, the war has never stopped since then, ending up in ethnic cleansing of the Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh.

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In the meantime, starting from at least the end of the Second World War the US has taken major responsibility for the fate of humanity by, inter alia, engaging in numerous peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding activities.

From this perspective, the main objective of this research is to study the US experience in peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding processes, and reflect that experience towards the South Caucasus, discussing the potential US engagement on the example of Armenian-Azerbaijani, in particular, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The main hypothesis is that given the shifting major power politics in the South Caucasus, when the US demonstrates comprehensive and multifaceted interest towards the South Caucasus, the US might directly or indirectly (through the third parties, such as NATO, UN, and so on) get involved in the peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding processes in the South Caucasus, in particular, in the framework of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

Methodology and Scope of Research

The research starts with comprehensive analysis of definitions to establish a working approach for peacekeeping and peacebuilding. It will be continued by the study of the US engagement in peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding activities, revealing both the historical path and contemporary state. This will be followed by the analysis of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and, in particular, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict as a case study for peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Finally, the results will be discussed in relation to US interests and priorities to reveal potential US engagement with conflict management and resolution. The research is primarily based on such methods as discourse analysis, historical and comparative study, case study, and scenario building.

US approaches towards peacekeeping and peacebuilding: Strategic level

The disintegration of the Soviet Union and the formation of the unipolar world order led to fundamental shifts in global politics. The rise of regional wars and ethno-political conflicts around the globe were among multiple signs of global changes.

The Persian Gulf War and Operation Desert Storm (even before the formal dissolution of the USSR)[1] demonstrated the US will for the support of the rules-based international order. In the meantime, the later history of the 1990s and beginning of the 21th century explicitly showed the US commitment to enforcing peace and stability in various parts of the world.

The most recent US National Security Strategy (2022) contains 4 "peacebuilding" and 1 "peacekeeping" words. In particular, it states that "*we will work to strengthen democracy around the world because democratic governance consistently outperforms authoritarianism in protecting human dignity, leads to more prosperous and resilient societies, creates stronger and more reliable economic and security partners for the United States, and encourages a peaceful world order" (*Strategy *p. 8). In the meantime, it contains the following paragraphs:*

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[1] Britannica, Persian Gulf War, 1990-1991, https://www.britannica.com/event/Persian-Gulf-War

- *Second, our **alliances and partnerships** around the world are our most important strategic asset and an indispensable element contributing to international peace and stability. A strong and unified NATO, our alliances in the Indo-Pacific, and our traditional security partnerships elsewhere do not only deter aggression; they provide a platform for mutually beneficial cooperation that strengthens the international order (p.11),*
- *We will work to confront these shared challenges and recommit to advancing the **Sustainable Development Goals by pursuing more inclusive development partnerships**, especially by putting local partners in the driver's seat, and by deploying a more expansive set of tools, including catalytic financing and integrated humanitarian, development, and **peacebuilding actions** (p.19),*
- *We will support African-led efforts to work toward political solutions to costly conflicts, increasing terrorist activity, and humanitarian crises, such as those in Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Somalia, and the Sahel, and invest in local and **international peacebuilding and peacekeeping** to prevent new conflicts from emerging (p.44).*[2]

In the meantime, tracing back to the 1990s, for instance, the US National Security Strategy (1995) contains the "peacekeeping" word 14 times and a separate chapter titled "Peace Operations."[3] The same chapter appears in the 1996 Strategy as well.[4]

The 1999 Strategy, titled "A National Security Strategy for a New Century", includes a section called "Smaller-Scale Contingencies," which states the following:

In addition to defending the U.S. homeland, the United States must be prepared to respond to the full range of threats to our interests abroad. Smaller- scale contingency operations encompass the full range of military operations short of major theater warfare, including humanitarian assistance, peace operations, enforcing embargoes and no-fly zones, evacuating U.S. citizens, and reinforcing key allies. These operations will likely pose frequent challenges for U.S. military forces and cumulatively require significant commitments over time. These operations will also put a premium on the ability of the U.S. military to work closely and effectively with other U.S. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations, regional and international security organizations and coalition partners.

It often will be in our national interest to proceed in partnership with other nations to preserve, maintain and restore peace. American participation in peace operations takes many forms, such as the NATO-led coalitions in Bosnia and Kosovo, the American-led UN force in Haiti, the recently concluded Military Observer Mission Ecuador and Peru (MOMEP), our participation in the coalition operation in the Sinai,

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[2] US National Security Strategy, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Biden-Harris-Administrations-National-Security-Strategy-10.2022.pdf.
[3] US National Security Strategy, 1995, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss-1995.pdf?ver=pzgo9pkDsWmIQqTYTC6O-Q%3d%3d.
[4] US National Security Strategy, 1996, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss1996.-pdf?ver=4f8riCrLnHIA-H0itYUp6A%3d%3d.

military observers in UN missions in Western Sahara, Georgia and the Middle East, and the UN mission in East Timor.[5]

It is worth mentioning that 1997 became well-known with the so-called Clinton Doctrine, which proposed military interventions to prevent humanitarian crises.[6] This concept later evolved and was adopted in a UN General Assembly Resolution.[7]

In the 2000s, when the National Security Strategy was published in 2002, the US was waging a war against terrorism. That reality left its clear mark on the Strategy, stating that:

Today, the United States enjoys a position of unparalleled military strength and great economic and political influence. In keeping with our heritage and principles, we do not use our strength to press for unilateral advantage. We seek instead to create a balance of power that favors human freedom: conditions in which all nations and all societies can choose for themselves the rewards and challenges of political and economic liberty. In a world that is safe, people will be able to make their own lives better. We will defend the peace by fighting terrorists and tyrants. We will preserve the peace by building good relations among the great powers. We will extend the peace by encouraging free and open societies on every continent.[8]

Meanwhile, regarding the African continent, the Strategy states that "coordination with European allies and international institutions is essential for constructive conflict mediation and successful peace operations…"[9]

The US National Security Strategy of 2006 went further, and in the chapter entitled "Work with Others to Defuse Regional Conflicts" it appeared with a separate subdivision on "Conflict Intervention," which states:

Some conflicts pose such a grave threat to our broader interests and values that conflict intervention may be needed to restore peace and stability. Recent experience has underscored that the international community does not have enough high-quality military forces trained and capable of performing these peace operations. The Administration has recognized this need and is working with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to improve the capacity of states to intervene in conflict situations. We launched the Global Peace Operations Initiative at the 2004 G-8 Summit to train peacekeepers for duty in Africa. We are also supporting the United Nations (U.N.) reform to improve its ability to carry out peacekeeping missions with enhanced accountability, oversight, and results-based management practices.[10]

However, the 2010 Strategy witnessed a change in wording. The "Sustain Broad Cooperation on Key Global Challenges" section states:

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[5] US National Security Strategy, 1999, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss-1999.pdf?ver=SLo909OTm5lAh0LQWBrRHw%3d%3d.

[6] The Clinton Doctrine, by Patrick Clawson, December 28, 1997, https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/-policy-analysis/clinton-doctrine.

[7] Ivan Šimonović, The Responsibility to Protect, December 2016, no. 4 vol. LIII, Human Rights, https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/responsibility-protect.

[8] US National Security Strategy, 2002, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/-nss2002.pdf?ver=oyVN99aEnrAWijAc_O5eiQ%3d%3d.

[9] Ibid.

[10] US National Security Strategy, 2006, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss-2006.pdf?ver=Hfo1-Y5B6CMl8yHpX4x6IA%3d%3d.

Peacekeeping and Armed Conflict: The untold loss of human life, suffering, and property damage that results from armed conflict necessitates that all responsible nations work to prevent it. No single nation can or should shoulder the burden for managing or resolving the world's armed conflicts. To this end, we will place renewed emphasis on deterrence and prevention by mobilizing diplomatic action, and use development and security sector assistance to build the capacity of at-risk nations and reduce the appeal of violent extremism. But when international forces are needed to respond to threats and keep the peace, we will work with international partners to ensure they are ready, able, and willing. We will continue to build support in other countries to contribute to sustaining global peace and stability operations, through U.N. peacekeeping and regional organizations, such as NATO and the African Union. We will continue to broaden the pool of troop and police contributors, working to ensure that they are properly trained and equipped, that their mandates are matched to means, and that their missions are backed by the political action necessary to build and sustain peace.[11]

However, already in the 2015 Strategy, there was a noticeable decline in peacekeeping-related issues. In particular, it states that:

We are deepening our security partnerships with African countries and institutions, exemplified by our partnerships with the U.N. and AU in Mali and Somalia. Such efforts will help to resolve conflicts, strengthen African peacekeeping capacity, and counter transnational security threats while respecting human rights and the rule of law…

…We will meet our financial commitments to the U.N., press for reforms to strengthen peacekeeping, and encourage more contributions from advanced militaries. We will strengthen the operational capacity of regional organizations like the African Union (AU) and broaden the ranks of capable troop-contributing countries, including through the African Peacekeeping Rapid Response Partnership, which will help African countries rapidly deploy to emerging crises…

…We will work vigorously both within the U.N. and other multilateral institutions, and with member states, to strengthen and modernize capacities—from peacekeeping to humanitarian relief—so they endure to provide protection, stability, and support for future generations.[12]

Finally, the US National Security Strategy of 2017 did not contain any single word on "peacebuilding" or "peacekeeping." Instead it speaks about cooperation with various partners to provide peace, security and stability in some regions of the world. For instance, it states: *"We will catalyze regional efforts to build security and prosperity through strong diplomatic engagement. We will isolate governments that refuse to act as responsible partners in advancing hemispheric peace and prosperity"* (p. 51). In addition, the US Government committed that, *"the United States will also encourage Pakistan to continue demonstrating that it is a responsible steward of its nuclear assets. We will continue to partner with Afghanistan to promote peace and*

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[11] US National Security Strategy, 2010, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/-NSS2010.pdf?ver=Zt7IeSPX2uNQt00_7wq6Hg%3d%3d.

[12] US National Security Strategy, 2015, https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/-NSS2015.pdf?ver=TJJ2QfM0McCqL-pNtKHtVQ%3d%3d.

security in the region. We will continue to promote anti-corruption reform in Afghanistan to increase the legitimacy of its government and reduce the appeal of violent extremist organizations. We will help South Asian nations maintain their sovereignty as China increases its influence in the region" (p. 50).

Thus, the content and context analysis of several US National Security Strategies demonstrates the transformation of US approaches to its military engagements in the world to provide justice, peace, and stability. In particular, while in the 1990s and early 2000s, the US government was much more determined to use force, later it became more reluctant and did their best to rely on diplomacy and non-military means.

US experience in peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding processes: from Kosovo to Syria and beyond

The transformation of the strategic vision and thought towards peacekeeping and peace enforcement found direct implications for US foreign and security policy making. The examples of operations in Gulf, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, and Syria clearly demonstrate the shift in US approaches to the peacekeeping operations and peacebuilding processes at a practical level.

First Gulf war

Following the end of Iran-Iraq War of 1980-1988 and multiple domestic problems, on August 2, 1990, Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein invaded oil-rich neighbor, Kuwait, seeking relief in economic issues. However, his actions provoked a strong response from the international community and, particularly, from the US. Being the first international crisis after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the US managed to assemble a diverse and powerful international coalition, which consisted of US NATO allies and Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Egypt. The 100-hour land war called "Operation Desert Storm," which followed an air campaign, pushed the Iraqi forces back inside Iraq.[13]

Kosovo operation

The NATO "Kosovo operation" started in the late 1990s as a response to the extending conflict between Serbian forces and Kosovo Liberation Army. NATO's air campaign against Serbian forces lasted for 78 days, after which a NATO-led peace support mission has been operating in Kosovo since June 1999.[14] Since then, US troops have participated in the NATO-led peacekeeping mission in Kosovo (KFOR).[15]

Afghanistan

The official U.S. military operation against the Taliban government in Afghanistan, initially supported by the UK government and later joined by other allies, began on October 7, 2001, in response to the September 11 terrorist attacks on the United States.

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[13] A Short History of the Department of State: The First Gulf War, https://history.state.gov/-departmenthistory/short-history/firstgulf.

[14] NATO's role in Kosovo, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_48818.htm.

[15] US peacekeepers ready to prevent violence in north Kosovo, commander says, *Reuters*, February 16, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/us-peacekeepers-ready-prevent-violence-north-kosovo-commander-says-2024-02-16/

The war against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan continued until 2021, when U.S. and allied forces withdrew from the country.[16]

The Iraq war (2003-2011)

The Iraq War was an armed conflict between a US-led coalition against the regime of Saddam Hussein. The war was part of a broader campaign against terrorist activity known as the Global War on Terror.[17]

Libyan war (2011)

In 2011, the Arab Spring spread to Libya, sparking an uprising against Muammar al-Qaddafi's four-decade rule and leading to civil war and international military intervention. Following the March 17, 2011, UN vote and UN resolution S/RES/1973 to establish a no-fly zone over Libya, the coalition of US and European allies began airstrikes against Libyan forces on March 19, 2011.[18]

According to the FP:

On March 28, 2011, U.S. President Barack Obama addressed the nation: "The task that I assigned our forces [is] to protect the Libyan people from immediate danger and to establish a no-fly zone…. Broadening our military mission to include regime change would be a mistake." Two days later, Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon declared, "The military mission of the United States is designed to implement the Security Council resolution, no more and no less…. I mean protecting civilians against attacks from Qaddafi's forces and delivering humanitarian aid." The following day, Clinton's deputy, James Steinberg, said during a Senate hearing, "President Obama has been equally firm that our military operation has a narrowly defined mission that does not include regime change."[19]

On the other hand, in comparison to the previous operations, the US role was quite limited, leaving the major operational volume to the European allies. In the meantime, many experts argue that NATO's Libyan operation marked the beginning of the end of the concept of humanitarian intervention, which had been on the rise since the 1990s.[20]

Syrian conflict

The Syrian conflict was another outcome of the Arab Spring and domestic uprising, which followed by an internationalization and engagement of multiple foreign powers.

According to the US Department of State, since the rise of ISIS in 2014, the U.S. government has worked closely with the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS to achieve a lasting defeat of the terror group. Working by, with, and through local partners, the Coalition achieved the territorial defeat of ISIS in Syria in March 2019. The Coalition remains committed to ISIS's enduring defeat through stabilization support to liberated areas, facilitating the return of displaced individuals, finding long-term solutions for

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[16] The U.S. War in Afghanistan, 1999 – 2021, *CFR,* https://www.cfr.org/timeline/us-war-afghanistan

[17] The Iraq War, https://www.georgewbushlibrary.gov/research/topic-guides/the-iraq-war#:~:text=The%-20Iraq%20War%20was%20an,the%20Global%20War%20on%20Terror.

[18] UN Security Council, S/RES/1973 (2011), https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/s/res/1973-%282011%29.

[19] Zenko, Micah, The Big Lie About the Libyan War. The Obama administration said it was just trying to protect civilians. Its actions reveal it was looking for regime change, *Foreign Policy,* March 22, 2016, https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/22/libya-and-the-myth-of-humanitarian-intervention/.

[20] Hamid, Shadi, Everyone says the Libya intervention was a failure. They're wrong., *Brookings,* April 12, 2016, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/everyone-says-the-libya-intervention-was-a-failure-theyre-wrong/

detained foreign ISIS fighters, and promoting justice and accountability efforts in Syria and Iraq.[21]

The US involvement in Syria has been limited to a small number of ground forces, without direct engagement against Assad's army and controlling key areas and supporting certain anti-government forces. Even in 2013, when chemical weapons were allegedly used by government forces (though some argue they were used by opposition forces), the U.S. refrained from an open anti-Assad operation.[22]

Thus, the first four cases are about direct US military involvement, while the last two (though with some reservations) showed the increasing role of diplomacy for the US instead of application of military force, Clinton's Doctrine and/or R2P concept.

Discussion and Conclusions

The continuing Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict raises questions about potential third-party engagement to foster peace and stability.

In this regard, given the recent intensification of Armenia and US relations, one might consider the possibility of a more active US peacekeeping engagement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization process to create a more stable strategic environment and contain further aggression by Azerbaijani towards the Republic of Armenia.

Given the above, the following potential scenarios of the US engagement might be specified:
- Direct military engagement
- Support for a UN (or other international organization, for instance, OSCE) mission
- Support for the EU mission in Armenia
- NATO engagement
- Distancing

Given the current political reality in the US, its strategic interests and priorities, the direct peacekeeping engagement in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict currently seems unrealistic. On the other hand, the 'distancing scenario' also seems not very realistic, given the recent developments in Armenia – US relations, especially over the last three years.

The second scenario might have been workable if there was that kind of agenda on the table. The same might be true with regard to potential NATO engagement.

Therefore, given the current political, geopolitical, and security landscape in the world and the South Caucasus, the most realistic scenario may involve direct US diplomatic engagement, with major support to the EU mission in Armenia.

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[21] U.S. Relations With Syria, October 17, 2023, *US Department of State,* https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-syria/
[22] Antony J. Blinken, SECRETARY OF STATE, Tenth Anniversary of the Ghouta, Syria Chemical Weapons Attack, *US Department of State,* August 21, 2023, https://www.state.gov/tenth-anniversary-of-the-ghouta-syria-chemical-weapons-attack/

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14. U.S. Department of Defense. "US National Security Strategy, 2002." https://history.defense.gov/Portals/70/Documents/nss/nss2002.pdf?ver=oyVN99aEnrA WijAc_O5eiQ%3d%3d.

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