

Cooperative Security

The concept of cooperative security arose in the United States during the later stages of the cold war period as it became apparent that the Soviet Union under Mikhail Gorbachev was not as inclined to imperial aggression as had been earlier assumed. Although Soviet forces in East Central Europe were evidently configured to attempt to occupy Western Europe in the event of war, it was conceded that such a posture could reflect an underlying intention not to initiate war, but simply to defend Soviet territory in a manner informed by the experience of World War II (1939–1945). If so, then it might be possible to stabilize the situation by negotiating measures designed to prevent surprise attack. These were officially termed *confidence-building measures*, but the phrase *cooperative security* was used as an expression of the underlying principle, namely, that each side would cede the legitimacy of territorial defense and would cooperate to impose restraint on offensive operations.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its alliance system, the original focus of concern essentially disappeared. A combined arms assault was no longer possible on continental scale, and the engagement of nuclear weapons in such an event was no longer the potential trigger for global catastrophe it was once considered to be. Primary security concerns shifted to more localized forms of conflict and to the process of weapons proliferation. In particular, it was recognized that the Russian Federation as principal successor to the Soviet Union had inherited a nearly intractable set of security burdens—most notably, a contracting economy that could not support the remnants of Soviet

conventional forces redeployed from East Central Europe, deterrent forces still actively engaged with the increasingly more capable American forces, and a fractured system for exercising managerial control over the massive arsenal of nuclear weapons the Soviet Union had assembled.

In this new context, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a leading American foundation, initiated a special project to address the problems of nuclear weapons proliferation with the burdens of the Russian Federation specifically in mind. The initiative was inspired by the president of the foundation, David Hamburg, and by Sam Nunn, a U.S. senator from Georgia, with cooperative security explicitly advanced as the central concept of the project. The phrase connoted not merely a stabilization of residual confrontation but a fundamental transformation of security relationships whereby all governments, the Russian Federation and the United States in particular, would collaborate in assuring the legitimate defense of sovereign territory by measures designed to preclude attack, and in establishing higher standards of managerial control over the large arsenals of nuclear weapons and stockpiles of explosive isotopes that had accumulated during the cold war.

The practical effect of the Carnegie project was significant but more limited than the cooperative security concept envisaged. The project was directly instrumental in initiating and developing what came to be known as the Nunn-Lugar program through which the United States provided financial and technical assistance to the Russian Federation to secure some portion of the nuclear weapons, explosive materials, and delivery systems deactivated from the inherited Soviet arsenal. From 1991 to 2007 as the United States provided some \$1.8 billion in financial assistance, approximately twenty-

five hundred weapons delivery systems were jointly deactivated, and collaborative projects were undertaken at nearly all permanent installations involved in the operations of Russian nuclear forces. Originally administered by the United States Department of Defense, the scope of the effort grew to include programs managed by the Department of Energy, the Department of State, and other U.S. government agencies. The accomplishments of the program were nonetheless limited by the fact that fundamental security policy in both countries featured indefinite continuation of legacy deterrent practices, with decreasing emphasis in the United States on bilateral legal regulation and increasing emphasis on preemptive potential. Although the size of the U.S. deterrent force was reduced, it still preserved enough firepower on immediately available alert status to decimate the Russian Federation and to threaten the retaliatory capability of its deterrent forces. That operational fact preserved confrontation as the dominant security principle and limited the scope for direct cooperation.

In the academic literature, cooperative security was recognized as a departure from the self-styled realist perspective on security, which holds that national interests immutably conflict and can only be assured by superior military power—a perspective that appears to require the advantages that only the United States has recently enjoyed. With varying degrees of politeness, realist theorists rejected the cooperative security idea as indefinitely impractical in principle. In contrast, an emerging globalist perspective holds that the process of globalization has altered the scale and character of primary threat as well as fundamental interest. The contention is that the massive forms of aggression that have been the traditional concern are very unlikely to occur because no country has either the incentive or the capacity to undertake them. Instead, the primary

source of threat is said to come from civil violence and associated terrorism, apparently arising from conditions of endemic economic austerity. Those forms of violence, the argument holds, undermine basic legal order necessary to support global economic performance and thereby threaten the dominant common interest all countries have in assuring their own economic performance. If so, then cooperation for mutual protection can be expected to emerge as the primary imperative of security policy, even for the United States.

It may take some time before the viability and endurance of the cooperative security idea can be reliably judged. Both its conceptual and its practical standing appear to depend on the eventual fate of the realist and the globalist perspectives—a contest that, at least in the United States, is yet to be decided.

See also *Cold War; Nuclear Proliferation and Nonproliferation; Soviet Union, Former.*

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