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## Slow Down: New Interventionism

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## SLOW DOWN: NEW INTERVENTIONISM

THE NEW INTERVENTIONISM 1991–1994: UNITED NATIONS EXPERIENCE IN CAMBODIA, FORMER YUGOSLAVIA AND SOMALIA (James Mayall ed.). Cambridge; New York: The Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1996. x + 238 pp.

*Reviewed by Yubo Song\**

International affairs are sometimes unpredictable. While the people of the world had hoped for a peaceful post-Cold War era, they have seen the era begin with a series of regional conflicts and civil wars within States. The United Nations (UN), with the success of Operation Desert Storm in the Gulf War, was being urged to play a more activist and important role in the establishment of a new world order. It adopted a proactive attitude in interventions, not merely to deter aggression across frontiers, but to protect the victims of civil conflicts. However, with most of the announced objectives of the UN's interventions remaining unfulfilled, many new problems have arisen and have become hotly debated issues. The UN itself has inevitably been criticized.

It was under these circumstances that this book appeared. This newly published book, concentrating on the three most sophisticated cases in which the UN has been involved, may contribute to our understanding of the huge gap between the reality of the post-Cold War era and the peaceful desires of the world people and the UN. The authors' aims in this volume are summarized in order to assess the prospects for international cooperation, and to assess the constraints that must be overcome under the principles of the UN Charter.

This edited work consists of four chapters and four appendices (including chronologies and selected texts of related UN resolutions) and an index. Chapter One, written by James Mayall, a professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, provides an instructional overview of the three major post-Cold War interventions in Cambodia, the former Yugoslavia and Somalia. Mayall explores the common themes and the major contrasts in these interventions and raises important questions about the possibility for, and limits of, international reform. Mayall develops a sketch of the backgrounds from which the "new interventionism" emerged and identifies common issues that have been invoked and lessons that can be

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derived from the experience of the UN in its attempt to facilitate an appropriate international response. Mayall attributes the recent interventions in part to the fall of communism, which he believes led to an exaggerated optimism about the democratic international order. He also states that support for a new doctrine of UN humanitarian intervention was spurred by the United Nations' victory in the Gulf War.

Chapter Two, written by Mats Berdal, a research fellow at the International Institute of Strategic Studies, and Michael Leifer, a professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, studies the intervention in Cambodia, where the UN's critical objective was to implement a previously negotiated political agreement. The UN operation in Cambodia may be claimed to be a relative success, but serious problems were also left unresolved. The toughest of these problems was that the coalition government established after the UN supervised multiparty election did not cooperate. The most serious lesson here, Berdal and Leifer surmise, is that a democratic multiparty election within a short and finite time is not necessarily a replicable means by which to secure so-called comprehensive political settlements, given the conventions and limitations of peacekeeping.

Chapter Three, written by Spyros Economides, a lecturer in International Relations and European Politics at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and Paul Taylor, a reader in International Relations at the London School of Economics, probes the case in the former Yugoslavia. The major problem they found in the UN operation was the difficulty in devising a credible division of labor and authority between the UN and the European Union (EU). Economides and Taylor contend that this conflict remained unresolved throughout the operation, with the EU occasionally exceeding its authority, going its own way and then trying to evade responsibility. The major lesson learned here was that regional organizations should normally act as the agent of the global organization, always within a mandate approved by the Security Council. Regional organizations should be subject to closer control as the scale of military intervention moves from traditional peacekeeping toward peace enforcement, which should always be managed by the UN.

Chapter Four, written by Ioan Lewis, emeritus professor of Anthropology at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and James Mayall reviews the intervention of Somalia. Lewis and Mayall view the UN's biggest challenge in Somalia as how to mount a humanitarian mission in a State with conflicting clan cultures and without a functioning national government. Lewis and Mayall go so far as to label this intervention as an inordinately expensive, poorly led,

poorly coordinated and incredibly cumbersome UN operation.<sup>1</sup> They state that it would be ignorant to consider the intervention a UN success and that in the future the UN should be more prudent in intervening in a conflict with which it is not familiar.

The common questions put forward in this book include: how to draw up a workable mandate which is sufficiently flexible to allow for inevitable change in the situation on the ground and sufficiently precise to prevent the UN from becoming embroiled in the conflict; how to specify the objectives of the operation and the means to be employed; and how to deal with contradictions between ambitious goals and inadequate tactics and resources, between the limited peacekeeping capability of the UN and the enormous peacekeeping demand.

An unfortunate truth in all three interventions, Mayall contends, was that the UN was called to relieve a catastrophe without any real understanding of what it could or should do. The absence of a peace to which all conflicting parties were committed also undermined the organization's ability to achieve its stated objectives. Hence, the theory and practice of peacekeeping operations, as a legacy of the Cold War, has undergone a severe test and entered a new stage since the end of the Cold War. Some of the customary principles of peacekeeping operations, such as the consent of conflicting parties, strict controls of weapons used by peacekeeping forces, and impartiality, are no longer strictly followed. The fact that tens of peacekeeping soldiers were killed in Somalia and hundreds of Blue Helmets were held as hostages in Bosnia-Herzegovina shows how harmful partiality in peacekeeping operations can be. However, it was fashionable for a time to talk of peace enforcement by the UN in a situation which, it was claimed, fell halfway between Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter.<sup>2</sup> To counter this tendency, Mayall warns that the UN shall and has already run serious risks of becoming part of the problem rather than part of the solution in entertaining the possibility of a chapter six-and-a-half solution.<sup>3</sup> The authors therefore conclude that the UN was right to intervene, right to fall short of enforcement but to go beyond traditional peacekeeping, but wrong in that it failed to match reliable ambitions with affordable means.

The value of the book is not to be limited to what it says is right and what is wrong with regard to the UN's interventions in recent years. What is more valuable is that the questions put forward will compel

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1. THE NEW INTERVENTIONISM 1991-1994: UNITED NATIONS EXPERIENCE IN CAMBODIA, FORMER YUGOSLAVIA AND SOMALIA 123 (James Mayall ed., 1996).

2. U.N. CHARTER chs. VI, VII.

3. See THE NEW INTERVENTIONISM 1991-1994, *supra* note 1, at 7.

people to think and make judgments for themselves. For instance, the questions in the third chapter are quite typical: whether the UN's intervention cost more lives than it saved; whether the UN has done what it can to protect life through all available mechanisms; and whether the UN helped to keep the crisis on the agenda and this was itself a benefit. All these questions are difficult to answer, and are a matter of judgment. The contributors, though they do not offer their judgments here, indicate clearly that the new interventionism should slow down, especially when the people, the States, and the UN are not yet familiar with, or well prepared for, the new era. This does not mean, that the UN shall remain inert. What is stressed is that only when the UN prevents itself from becoming drawn into a conflict can it fulfill its role as an impartial referee. Only when the UN is widely and substantially supported, and enjoys high credibility, can it play a more constructive role in the reform of the international community.

The authors' main position is that they do not, as some commentators have done, simply criticize the UN, but rather they contend that the major powers should be more responsible for the inefficiencies of the UN's interventions. They also indicate that the EU's improper action in the former Yugoslavia has weakened the UN's ability to achieve its goals. This book, although it deals with the problems of world politics, also touches on issues of international law. For example, the editor has repeatedly stressed that the Security Council is empowered by the Charter to maintain peace and security in the world. By maintaining peace and security, however, the Security Council inevitably faces the problem of respecting state sovereignty.

The solid analyses of this book are based on updated materials, closely connected to international contexts. They are more comprehensive rather than profound or penetrating, which may be due to the limitation of length. It would be even more valuable had the positive aspects of the UN's operations of recent years been more closely evaluated. Nonetheless, we can hardly expect better results in such a short time. The past, if not forgotten, is a guide for the future. There is still much to learn from the UN's experience with interventions after the Cold War. And this book can be ranked as one of the few good ones to which the UN and major powers should refer when they derive their lessons from these operations.