Partners in Peace?
UN-NATO Cooperation in Kosovo, 1999-2007

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Abstract

The UN and NATO have been tasked with cooperating to provide security, distribute humanitarian relief and manage reconstruction in several conflict and post-conflict settings. These joint operations triggered scholarly interest in inter-organizational cooperation, with theoretical claims conforming roughly to rationalist, constructivist and sociological institutionalist approaches to international organization (IO). As a theory-building exercise, we investigate where cooperation did and did not emerge in Kosovo (1999-2007) and use these claims to develop a preliminary explanation of why cooperation emerged where it did. Our initial research suggests IO cooperation was substantial among field staff but infrequent and often symbolic at the intergovernmental or institutional (headquarters) level. We argue that different explanatory factors shaped cooperative outcomes at each level. Intergovernmental mandates were political bargains to satisfy divergent member preferences rather than a collective effort to divide tasks based on organizational capabilities and expertise. At the institutional level, UN and NATO staff developed divergent and rigid task priorities to protect their organizational culture and secure resources from key members. In contrast, NATO-UN understandings of task priorities and allocations converged more frequently in the field because the staff enjoyed considerable autonomy and jointly operated in a conflict environment—an environment that pressured them to set aside cultural difference and divide tasks based on capabilities and expertise. We conclude by highlighting that if Kosovo is representative of inter-IO cooperation, then policymakers should be cautious about focusing reform efforts on strengthening it at the institutional and intergovernmental levels.

Introduction

In many conflict and post-conflict settings, multiple international organizations (IOs) are tasked with cooperating to provide security, deliver humanitarian relief and manage reconstruction. For example, the UN’s membership has directed the organization to make, enforce, keep and build peace with regional organizations including the EU, OSCE, OAS, ECOWAS and Arab League. Some of the most prominent joint operations have involved the UN and NATO in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan. As a theory building exercise, we investigate where cooperation did or did not emerge in Kosovo (1999-2007) and offer a preliminary explanation of why cooperation emerged where it did. This research suggests that IO cooperation—the development of shared view of what tasks should be prioritized and which organization should complete these tasks—was substantial among field staff but infrequent and often symbolic at the intergovernmental or institutional (headquarters) level.

Why was NATO-UN cooperation more prominent in the field than at headquarters or among members? The possible answers that scholars of inter-organizational cooperation provide conform roughly to conventional theories of international organization. Rationalist approaches suggest that cooperation depends on high levels of interdependence and well-designed institutions. For statists, intergovernmental interdependence incentivizes
members to ensure a balanced distribution of resources among IOs and allocate tasks based on each organization’s specific expertise and capabilities. Scholars that treat IOs as self-directed bureaucracies argue that IO cooperation increases when the staff anticipates undertaking joint operations and invests in bureaucratic institutions that routinize joint planning, resource and information sharing and coordination in the field. For constructivists, cooperation is conditional on the conformity between task assignments and an organization’s culture. IOs avoid coordination where its assigned tasks violate cultural norms even if these tasks are assigned by members or make functional sense. Finally, sociological institutionalism links cooperation to mutual resource dependency. Organizations will jointly set priorities and task allocations if this cooperation makes it easier to extract material and symbolic resources from the external environment—resources needed to stay relevant and autonomous.

In Kosovo, a different theoretical approach initially shaped cooperative outcomes at each level of the NATO-UN operation. Consistent with a statist view, the intergovernmental mandate was a political bargain among central players to satisfy divergent member preferences rather than a collective effort to divide tasks based on organizational capabilities and expertise. The primary compromise was a UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution intended to confer UN legitimacy on NATO activities, reaffirm the Council’s primacy in international peace and security and ensure NATO’s freedom of action in the subsequent joint peace operation. Russia, Germany and the U.S. were interested in NATO and the UN operating in Kosovo but for different reasons. Consequently, the resolution delegated general responsibilities but did not detail the allocation of tasks, precluded joint planning and made resource dependency one sided. Indeed, the balance of resources tilted heavily toward NATO: NATO would have ample resources and a narrow responsibility for security while the UN would have limited resources and broad humanitarian and administrative responsibilities.

These deficiencies at the intergovernmental level were exacerbated by divergent and rigid task priorities at the institutional level where UN and NATO staff sought to protect their organizational culture and secure resources from key members. At NATO headquarters, the staff’s preoccupation with accommodating key members led officials to unilaterally and narrowly interpret their security responsibility and limit tasks accordingly. This interpretation also conformed to NATO’s military culture—a culture that privileged military tasks with narrowly-defined objectives and resisted the ad hoc adoption civilian security tasks that constitute mission creep. In New York, UN officials avoided institutionalized cooperation with their NATO counterparts because close cooperation invited accusations of militarizing its humanitarian and reconstruction work. Indeed, officials criticized NATO field commanders who authorized humanitarian and administrative tasks even as they avoided UN field requests to provide more resources and guidance to complete these tasks. For many headquarters staff, NATO was a party to the conflict and close cooperation would alienate Russia and Serbia, make it difficult for the UN
to eventually act as honest broker in final status talks and put at risk the UN’s identity as an independent and impartial international organization.

In contrast, the frequency with which UN and NATO field staff cooperated is difficult to explain given the divergent membership preferences, cultural proclivities that cautioned against coordination and the one-sided distribution of resources vis-à-vis responsibilities. In many areas, UN and NATO field staff coordinated their work in ways that deviated from the expectations of members and headquarters staff. More specifically, field staff in these areas reached common understandings of what tasks should be prioritized and who would carry out these tasks based on available resources and expertise. For example, some NATO commanders helped their UN counterparts provide relief to refugees and they redefined their security mandate to operate makeshift prisons, conduct joint policing operations and, on occasion, protect Kosovar Serbs. In these areas, the two organizations also developed informal but institutionalized mechanisms for mutual consultation, coordinating reactions to local developments, information sharing and even, at times, planning joint tactical operations.

Our preliminary explanation is that field cooperation was made possible because staff enjoyed considerable autonomy and jointly operated in the same conflict environment—a conflict environment where incompletion of certain tasks was costly for officials from both organizations. In these situations, staff from both organizations jointly prioritized a functional allocation of tasks based on relative capabilities ahead of cultural biases and intergovernmental and institutional preferences. Conversely, these immediate local pressures were not strongly felt at the intergovernmental and headquarters level—and thus did not incentivize members and staff to overcome political and organizational barriers to cooperation. In fact, the importance of pressure to cooperate from the conflict environment is reaffirmed during later phases of the conflict. In 2004, widespread Kosovar protests and violence led to a deteriorating security situation that put at risk the KFOR-UNMIK mission. As a result, officials in the field and headquarters feared it would be costly for both organizations if each did not agree to carry-out tasks they were deliberately avoiding. Consequently, UNMIK started final status negotiations to appease the Kosovars and NATO took responsibility for training local security forces.

Our preliminary findings indicate that the Kosovo case does not support a widely-held view that prescribing top-down reforms will improve inter-organizational cooperation. If this conclusion holds after further case studies are conducted, it highlights an important policy implication. Scholars often argue that reforms should target improvements in member state task and resource allocation and senior management should collectively establish effective platforms for joint mission planning, information sharing and task coordination. One implication of a top-down approach is to ensure that coordinated decisions are

implemented consistently on the ground. To do so, however, would invariably involve narrowing the task discretion of field personnel. The Kosovo case highlights the risk of this approach. It suggests that improvement at the intergovernmental and institutional level is unlikely because the causes of non-cooperation are fundamental political structures that are hard to overcoming or remedied through institutional design. If so, any reforms that reduce field autonomy risk reproducing these political problems on the ground—and counteracting conflict conditions that incentivize field cooperation.

**Theories of International Organization and Inter-Organizational Cooperation**

The growing number of joint peace operations has triggered scholarly interest in inter-organizational cooperation, with theoretical claims conforming roughly to rationalist, constructivist and sociological institutionalist approaches to IO. Rationalist approaches can further be divided into realist, neoliberal institutionalist and bureaucratic approaches. Realists are generally skeptical of institutionalized cooperation but argue that member states may exercise power through cooperative arrangements to address a common external threat (Mearsheimer, 1995). That said, any arrangement will reflect the relative bargaining power of the respective IO memberships rather than a functionally-optimal division of labor (Krasner, 1991). Moreover, Great Power members will prefer *ad hoc* arrangements to meet pressing threats and avoid standing commitments. For example, David Lightburn (2005) insists that NATO members have rejected the view that the alliance is “a global policeman” to support missions not tightly linked to its members’ interests. Even when members agree to a joint UN-NATO operation, since Bosnia, NATO members—especially the U.S.—will not accept arrangements that limit the alliance’s freedom of action by placing it under UN authority or committing to tasks where there are fuzzy objectives risks and put troops at additional risk.

A second statist approach, neoliberal institutionalism, is more optimistic about sustained cooperation where memberships have interdependent goals and interests. These interdependencies lead states to negotiate mandates that balance the distribution of resources across IOs and allocate tasks according to each organization’s expertise and capabilities. In turn, functional arrangements solve collective action and coordination problems so the memberships reduce transaction costs and effectively pool resources (Keohane and Martin, 1995; Abbott and Snidal, 1998). Put another way, cooperation depends on members having convergent interest in a particular outcome and developing mandates to bring together IOs with the necessary expertise to achieve that outcome. For example, Jakobsen (2005) argues that NATO members would benefit from joint operations to address contemporary security threats because the UN confers legitimacy on NATO activities and offers humanitarian and reconstruction expertise. For its part, NATO has the military capabilities to confront spoilers, train a post-conflict military and provide a sense of security for international workers and local populations. Moreover, the contemporary security environment frequently presents situations where both
memberships would be well served to exploit these comparative strengths and should design arrangements accordingly.

In practice, however, the mandates of joint operations are the product of crisis bargaining where comparative strengths are secondary to more parochial national interests. In most cases, interdependencies are mixed in with competing interests: the members perceive benefits from using both organizations even as they pursue divergent conflict outcomes—a divergence that produces, as it did in Afghanistan, a “marriage of convenience, rather than an effective partnership building on comparative strengths” (Harsch, 2012). These marriages of convenience result in an imbalance in authority and resources that give the independent IO little incentive to coordinate priorities and task allocations with its more dependent partner. Moreover, the Kosovo case shows that the urgency of reaching an agreement during a crisis gives each membership incentive to set aside contentious issues, leave task assignments ambiguous and give lower levels little time for joint planning.

Neoliberal approaches are also problematic because member control over joint operations is usually incomplete. Ambiguities in intergovernmental mandates gives operational discretion to staff and field managers, and the membership often relies on field reports written by the staff itself to monitor daily organizational activity (Power, 2008). Under these conditions, principal-agent approaches would suggest that inter-organizational coordination is at least partially dependent on whether each IO chooses to use its autonomy to coordinate tasks (Hawkins et al., 2005). That said, principal-agent approaches are limited by their agnostic view of IO preferences. On one hand, IOs may use their autonomy to collectively ‘fill-in’ resource or mandate gaps. On the other hand, autonomy may reduce cooperation if one or both shirk on agreed tasks or unilaterally pursue tasks its partner organization is already performing.

Bureaucratic politics provides one explanation of the content of IO preferences. In this view, each IO will cooperate if cooperation supports bureaucratic interests in larger budgets and mission autonomy (Allison and Halperin, 1972). Scholars that treat IOs as self-directed bureaucracies argue that IO cooperation increases when the headquarter staff anticipates undertaking joint operations and invests in bureaucratic institutions that routinize joint planning, resource and information sharing and coordination among the field staff (Kille and Henrickson, 2011). In this view, competing IOs will lobby members to assign (or, if possible, assign itself) tasks that advance these interests and delegate less lucrative tasks to other organizations. Conversely, where IOs are not direct competitors, they will coordinate their activities if this coordination generates additional resources for both organizations (Williams, 2011). For example, we would expect IOs to cooperate where it strengthens them vis-à-vis third party competitors or their differentiated expertise and capabilities brings task completion and additional lucrative assignments from the memberships. While we might expect these bureaucratic dynamics to motivate the UN to pursue cooperative strategies, it is not clear that NATO faces any third party competitors.
or, until 2004, that coordinating with the UN was expected to produce additional resources (Power, 2008).

Constructivist scholars provide an alternative understanding of the content of IO preferences. They argue that IO autonomy is a result not just of inadequate member control but also an “array of authorities” that enable an IO to construct the inter-subjective meanings member states use to define collective problems and the appropriate solution to those problems (Finnemore, 1996; Barnett and Finnemore, 2004). More specifically, IOs will embrace tasks that conform to the principles of the organization’s culture and pay lip service, avoid or reject tasks deemed to deviate from those principles (Weaver, 2008; Barnett and Coleman, 2005). Consequently, cooperation is conditional on the conformity between task assignments and an organization’s culture. Where two IOs share a common culture, they are likely to agree on task priorities but compete over the most appropriate organization for performing these tasks. That said, cooperation may still occur if tasks are reinterpreted by an authoritative or entrepreneurial coordinator able to frame the allocation of tasks to ‘fit’ with the cultures of both organizations.

Where IOs have complimentary cultures, cooperation may be largely unnecessary as they may disagree about task priorities but will independently pursue different tasks. For example, the military culture of an alliance like NATO should privilege narrowly-defined military tasks and avoid the ad hoc adoption of civilian security tasks that constitute mission creep (Winslow and Schwartzel, 2004). This culture will complement the a UN culture of impartiality in the provision of humanitarian or reconstruction services—a culture that would avoid working too closely with a military alliance like NATO while welcoming NATO’s decision to focus narrowly on military tasks and avoid militarizing the UN’s humanitarian and civilian work. At the same time, the self-assignment of tasks reflects organizational rather than functional pressures and the rigidity of cultural biases should prevent cooperation even as conflict conditions intensify pressure for NATO to undertake civilian-security tasks and UN to welcome this material assistance.

An alternative functionalist argument is that IOs use their autonomy to adapt to their task environment (Haas, 1991; Howard, 2007). In some cases, the task environment rewards conformity and punishes non-conformity by withholding material and symbolic resources to remain relevant. Moreover, some IOs are better learning organizations because they develop formal and informal mechanisms for obtaining reliable information from their environment, discerning lessons learned and incorporating these lessons into new organizational routines and structures. Where the task environment applies pressure in the same direction on both organizations, these organizations may jointly coordinate response to these pressures through formal and informal joint planning and assessment as well as information sharing and procedural arrangements. Conversely, the task environment can create pressure to compete rather cooperate with the environment ‘selects out’ and reward the organization most capable of adapting to the environment (Pfeffer and Salanick, 1977).
Overview of UN-NATO Cooperation in Kosovo (1999-2007)

UN-NATO cooperation in Kosovo can be provisionally divided into three periods—an early period from 1999 to 2001 and a late period between 2001 and 2007. The evidence confirms that for the most part, these two organizations partnered much more successfully on the ground (Cockell, 2002). The pressures exerted by the conflict environment on both NATO and the UN led many, though not all, field officials to mutually coordinate despite cultural biases and a lack of intergovernmental pressure. Moreover, to the extent cooperation at the institutional level eventually emerged, it was also motivated by major shifts in the conflict environment.

The pressure of the conflict environment to cooperate varied during each of these periods. During the bombing campaign (March 24-June 10, 1999) the main task was providing humanitarian relief to the refugees flowing into neighboring countries—a flow that far exceeded UNHCR expectations and capabilities. After the UNSC passed Resolution 1244 which ended the bombing campaign, NATO (through KFOR) and the UN (through UNMIK) struggled to address the security and governance vacuum in Kosovo itself. The conflict environment shifted once again after 2003-04 when Kosovar protests and intensifying violence exerted pressure on the UN and NATO to restore order by renewing negotiations on the province's final status. This shift in the conflict environment led officials at UN and NATO to agree to take on tasks each had previously resisted. In return, NATO officials agreed to disband the Kosovo Protection Corps despite its previous insistence that disbanding the KPC was UNMIK's responsibility. These shifts in the conflict (task) environment are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. UN-NATO Task Dependence in Kosovo (1999-2007)

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<td>Shift from Humanitarian relief</td>
<td>Security and institutions</td>
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<td>Shift to Security, law and order, institution-building</td>
<td>Kosovo's final status and withdrawal</td>
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UN-NATO Cooperation during Operation Allied Force (March 24-June 10, 1999)

Kosovo was an autonomous province in the Former Yugoslavia populated predominantly by ethnic Albanians that lost its self-rule from Belgrade in 1990. At that time, Kosovar Albanians began a non-violent underground resistance directed against the authorities in Belgrade. Tension between the Albanians and the Serbian government started to escalate in March 1998 when Serbian security forces killed 85 people in an attempt to curtail the influence of paramilitary Kosovo Liberation Army—the armed wing of the Kosovar resistance.
Please, note this is work in progress. Contact us for further info and details.
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Thank you for your understanding!