

2009 ASRC Working Session 1

Presentation by Ambassador Roy Reeve – “A View from the Field”

-CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY-

Introduction

Virtually the last paragraph of the Helsinki Final Act, which was agreed in July 1975 in Geneva, relates to the geographical notification of military maneuvers. The whole chapter on Military Confidence Building Measures represents the first attempt by CSCE/OSCE to agree on mechanisms for early warning and conflict prevention.

However, the conflicts, which took place post-1975 in Europe, were more linked to the collapse of federal States and the desire for new nation-State building and self-determination, rather than the major conflict thought about in the mid- 1970s.

Following these conflicts, OSCE field missions were deployed throughout Former Yugoslavia as well as in the areas of the “frozen” conflicts in Trans-Dniestria and the Southern Caucasus.

What has been the contribution of OSCE field operations with regard to their ability to act to provide early warning of potential conflict and what role, if any, have they had in the prevention of possible armed confrontation or civil breakdown?

Early Warning

A physical presence on the ground, with activities/projects in all three dimensions, should place the OSCE in a prime role in identifying potential conflict situations, whether militarily or societal. Within the mission area, advice/support can be given to political decision makers whilst reporting structures enable all participating States to be fully informed about emerging risks. However, the influence on the ground may be limited - either through self-censorship or lack of adequately trained personnel capable of identifying emerging threats.

The mission’s mandate may also exclude the possibility of acting in the case of potential friction/conflict. During my service, the missions in Yerevan and Baku were excluded from participating in the processes of the “Minsk Group”, even though they could have been in a position to add to that mission’s knowledge/information as well as improve their own understanding of developments in their own missions’ areas.

A valuable input to any mission’s ability to understand possible sources of tension comes from the activities of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). These can be important in identifying issues in minority communities, which could increase tensions/misunderstandings with central authorities. Early identification of potential

problems could provide a basis for the full engagement of all the tools that missions have at their disposal to resolve/ameliorate the situation. However, there needs to be better information sharing between the permanent mission on the ground and the “confidential” activities of the HCNM.

Participating States should also be willing to provide rapid reaction/guidance to any signals received from the field. A greater flow of guidance and advice from the Troika and CPC would have been welcome in my particular posts – short of “backseat driving” – when it comes to operational decisions.

Conflict Prevention and Resolution

My first encounter with an OSCE mission engaged in conflict prevention work was in Ukraine in the mid- 1990s. Part of the Mission’s task was to assist in the peaceful resettlement of the returning Crimean Tartars through the use of “soft” confidence building measures. The aim was to avoid potential ethnic friction/conflict, which might have arisen with the return of an exiled population to areas now occupied by others. This function ended with a mandate change for the Mission. This, to me, further underlines the importance of having a mission mandate, which permits a field mission to deploy all of the resources and skills available within the OSCE. Moreover, its presence should not be seen by a host government as some kind of badge of second class status, which could lead to it imposing restrictions upon a field operation’s ability to act.

The Mission to Georgia was deployed in 1992 after the end of hostilities between South Ossetia and Georgia. Until August 2008, the mission’s prime role was to assist in the peaceful, comprehensive resolution of the conflicts and to endeavor to prevent further outbreaks of violence.

Its role was limited by the existing structure for the resolution of the conflicts. The Mission to Georgia (and the European Commission) was present only as an observer in the agreed negotiating format. Whilst suggestions and advice were listened to, there was no pressure or necessity on the side of the parties involved to act.

Between 1992 and 2005, there appeared to be no serious political will from any of the directly involved parties to move towards a permanent resolution of the conflict. All were content with a frozen “status quo”. The “anti-smuggling” operation conducted in the summer of 2005 by the new Georgian government marked a change in approach. Territorial integrity was the main priority and the restoration of Ossetia and Abkhazia of the highest importance. It is worth noting that despite the great parallels involved in the attempts to resolve both the South Ossetian and Abkhaz conflicts, two international organizations had responsibility for each – the UN and the OSCE. Close co-ordination and information exchange were an essential part of business.

Although a great deal of successful work was achieved in the area of “soft” confidence building measures through small projects related to police, media and the human dimension, any trust or linkages created subsequently fell victim to wider issues.

Hopefully, the experiences gained by people from all communities will not be lost. Even the Mission to Georgia's Economic Rehabilitation Programme, which was designed as a contribution to the conflict resolution process and which offered genuine prospects for bringing communities together on the basis of common interest, will never be repeated.

The expansion of the negotiating format in the case of Trans-Dniestria - something which was being attempted in the Georgian/South Ossetian case albeit unsuccessfully - brought little in the way of positive benefit. Although the OSCE has been regarded as the main international body to resolve all three of the post-Soviet Union frozen conflicts, real influence has always laid elsewhere.

Crisis Management

To state the obvious, when conflict does break out, the OSCE has neither the resources nor the political weight to intervene directly. In the Balkans, the UN, NATO and the EU more latterly have taken the lead in ending ethnic conflicts and establishing crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation structures. In Georgia in 2008, it was the EU Presidency and US dealing directly with the Russian Federation, which brought an end to the conflict, with the OSCE Permanent Council and the Chairman-in-Office acting in support. The lack of military assets and rapidly deployable resources will always limit the Organization's ability to intervene directly in a conflict situation. "Crisis management" from a mission's point of view is reduced essentially to force protection and duty of care.

Post-Conflict Rehabilitation

Here, field missions do have the ability to act directly and positively. The full range of economic and human dimension activities and projects can be deployed to create linkages and partnerships between previously conflicting parties and the flexibility of budgetary mechanisms (voluntary contributions) can ensure major economic resources for confidence building projects. The mission can also co-ordinate the activities of other bilateral and international donors by identifying areas of need, whilst human dimension activities can work towards restoring confidence and trust between communities and ethnic groups.

Considerations

From a field mission's point of view, the following are the factors, which impact upon its abilities to function effectively in the areas of conflict prevention, resolution and rehabilitation:

- Quality of mandate – the less restrictive the better.
- Willingness of all parties to regard OSCE as an equal partner, not just a "milk cow".
- Relationship with host authorities, particularly with regard to willingness to listen to critical advice.
- Modest, realistic ambitions. Processes take time and are not susceptible to fast,

easy “solutions”, particularly where cultural and historical differences are involved.

- The consensus rule.
- The need for a military component, not just in the mission but in the Vienna Secretariat.
- The non-career nature of the OSCE can lead to a lack of continuity and/or stake in the success of the mission.
- The emergence of other players, particularly EU ESDP Missions can have an impact on the role of the OSCE – i.e. Kosovo, Georgia.