

Disguising Power Politics

According to Urquhart, the use of the word 'United' in the organization's name, United Nations, comes from united in war not united in peace, referencing the Atlantic Charter of 1941. It is worth mentioning that the permanent members of the Security Council with the veto power are the wartime alliance leaders. This introduction is necessary to understand the resolutions and enforcements of the United Nations across its history. Without understanding the purpose of establishing the United Nations, it will be confusing to understand its actions or lack thereof. By tracing the trajectory of development of peacekeeping of the United Nations since its inception in 1948 until 2025, we find multiple phases and shifts in strategies over the years. These phases, successes and failures sum up the interest of the countries that initiated the United Nations. The United Nations is the perfect disguise of manipulation of world politics serving the interests of the United States as observed through the United Nations handling of crises since 1948.

Early operations of the UN were defined as classic. This started with (UNTSO), United Nations Truce Supervision Organization which was the UN's first peacekeeping mission in 1948 to observe and monitor a ceasefire between the Arabs and the Israelis. The UN orchestrated and supported the Israelis in stealing the land of Palestine from its original Palestinian owners. Through the U.N General Assembly, the western powers were able to plant the seed for the creation of the state of Israel, and maintain its existence to prevent any condemnation of the atrocities and war crimes committed by the Israelis. For the past seventy-six years, the Israelis have created chaos in the Middle East, continuously

committing massacres, genocides of the Palestinians and defying international law under the watch of the UN and the veto of the US.

Another peacekeeping mission that served as an example to Western manipulation of world politics during the early years of the United Nations was the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) in the Suez Crisis in 1956 which was designed to observe and monitor a ceasefire and withdrawal of armed forces. This crisis erupted when Israel invaded Egypt. While Britain and France, in a prior arrangement with Israel, gave an ultimatum to both Israel and Egypt to withdraw their forces away from the Suez Canal for ten miles, they only bombed Egyptian targets and airfields helping the Israelis in their invasion of the Egyptian Suez Canal. Even though the ultimatum was given to both countries, only Egypt was bombed. Urquhart writes that nearly all the people he knew greatly opposed the Swiss expedition, including himself, as they considered it a contemptible, dishonest, and a doomed act by the French and British governments. These so-called early “peacekeeping missions” were dominated by the bipolar world influenced by the Cold War.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, the UN faced new challenges that were more complex in nature involving intrastate conflicts. During this period the role of the UN expanded to monitoring and observing conflicts within a country. However, they had no mandate to protect civilians and had to stay neutral. Urquhart states that immediately after the independence of the Belgian Congo in June of 1960, “sensational stories of the abuse, harassment, rape and murder of Belgian colonists sent a shockwave through the western world, while the introduction of Belgian paratroopers caused indignation in the Congo and Africa.” (Urquhart, 145) The Congolese tried to seek justice in their own way against the Belgian settlers and this led to panic erupting on both sides. This prompted the UN to intervene in the mounting civil conflict highlighting the intricate challenges of managing civil wars within intrastate dynamics. Now, peacekeepers are involved within internal conflicts in the middle of ongoing violence. Due to the Superpowers’ influence, UN Peacekeeping missions during this period had little success due

to limited mandates, the need to stay neutral, inadequate resources, and constraints due to superpower rivalries.

The end of the Cold War led to a new generation of peacekeeping with an increase in the number of more involved and complicated missions. UN peacekeeping now included humanitarian missions in addition to civil wars in intrastate conflicts. Urquhart mentions that Boutros-Ghali's 'Agenda for Peace' presented new ideas, yet it really did not present any serious change to traditional UN peacekeeping missions, citing examples such as the cease-fire monitoring missions in the Golan Heights and Cyprus. Multiple failures happened during that era as UN Peacekeepers were unable to prevent conflicts or massacres like Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia (Srebrenica).

These failures led General Secretary, Kofi Annan, in 1998 to insist that the UN should interfere and have the responsibility to protect civilians from their own governments even with military force if needed. Meisler notes that "this view appeared to contravene the UN Charter's prohibition against UN interference." (Meisler, 352) The main reason for the failures, however, was the lack of interest of the superpowers to intervene since they had no national interest in stopping atrocities. The UN correspondent of the New York Times shared her views about the Secretary General's power, ability, and influence by saying: "He may be at the pinnacle of World diplomacy, but the throne he occupies is really a hollow box." (Meisler, 353).

Early in 1999, Serbian troops, soldiers and military operatives attacked Kosovo, as they did previously in 1992, and the UN was incapable of stopping the Serbs. The United States understood that if it were to try anything within the United Nations, it would fail due to other veto holding countries. Additionally, Meisler comments that "Fearing a veto by Russia, a traditional ally of Serbia, the United States bypassed the Security Council and called on NATO instead." (Meisler 353) The NATO intervention to stop the ethnic cleansing of Albanian Muslims and subsequent bombing of Serbia proved effective, forcing the Serbs to cease their actions. At the end it was NATO troops rather than UN troops

that were patrolling Kosovo. The UN failed again. These failures were alarming to the operations of the UN leading to large criticism of peacekeeper mandates, rules of engagements and the use of force.

Those events of the nineties led to the need for reform. On August 21st, 2000, the UN issued the Brahimi report. “The Secretary-General has asked the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations, composed of individuals experienced in various aspects of conflict prevention, peacekeeping and peace-building, to assess the shortcomings of the existing system and to make frank, specific and realistic recommendations for change.” (The Brahimi Report, viii). The UN realized the need for reform to face the challenges in a more appropriate manner than it did, seeking to improve the effectiveness of its peacekeeping activities. The Brahimi report called for modifications and changes that demand stronger mandates, rapid deployment, need for intelligence and more effective logistics.

Peacekeeping missions evolved to become multi-dimensional including humanitarian, political and developmental aid. Countries like Sierra Leone, Liberia, and East Timor needed help in elections, government building, institutional building, and human rights mandates. In countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Mali there was a need for the protection of civilians and use of force mandates due to the increasing danger of the region of operations. This shows that sometimes the UN can have some success in areas where there are no interests for the super powers.

Compounding the UN challenges, the United States decided to invade Iraq in 2003, basing its invasion on false claims about weapons of mass destruction. Initially intending not to ask the UN for permission, President George Bush only did so after Tony Blair, the British prime minister and Bush’s supporter, insisted that they should get a “UN cover.” (Meisler 357) The US gave erroneous and exaggerated evidence to the UN, attempting to manipulate the UN into allowing the invasion, which it did not. At the end, Meisler explains that President Bush had stated in a televised address “the United Nations Security Council has not lived up to its responsibilities, “So we will rise to ours.”” (Meisler 360) Again, the UN was helpless against the wishes of the superpowers.

The US's disregard of the UN is further exposed by the events of October 2023, as the world watched a live genocide taking place in Gaza, Palestine. Israeli forces have been bombing the civilians of Gaza for over fifteen months. It has caused the loss of lives of tens of thousands of civilians, more than sixty percent of whom are children and women. It has displaced two million people from their homes. It has destroyed all infrastructure. It has bombed most hospitals, universities, schools and killed more than 100 journalists. Add to that the psychological trauma of the whole population that had been exposed to the terrors of this genocide. The United Nations is still unable to pass any serious resolutions to stop the genocide due to the veto of the United States. Looking back at UNTSO, the Palestine question has been the litmus test of the United Nations. The results of the test are the Gaza genocide. ■

In conclusion, based on its Charter the United Nations has tried to fulfill its announced goal. The UN secretary generals tried to introduce some serious change, but failed. Over the years, the peacekeeping missions have evolved from traditional to very complex in recent times. Yet, the main reason for the failures of the UN is the manipulation of its decisions to serve countries with veto power, especially the U.S. The trajectory of UN peacekeeping has evolved to adapt to the dynamics of political global change and conflicts. It started with traditional peacekeeping missions of monitoring from inception to the 1980s with limited mandates during the Cold War. However, the UN is not a powerful actor in international politics, mostly because the UN itself possesses no power of its own. During the Cold War, the United States and the USSR consistently failed to reach agreements, making the UN mostly ineffective. After the Cold War, achieving consensus among the five permanent members of the Security Council—the US, Russia, France, Britain, and China—remains extremely difficult if not impossible, further compromising the UN's effectiveness. Despite its efforts, the UN's ability to act depends on the impossible agreement of its member states, making its impact very limited in world politics.