Re-evaluating the role of the UN as a global peace-keeper

General Assembly 1 (GA1)
disarmament and international security

From a separated world to global peace: the need
for a new look on institutions.

Forum: General Assembly 1 (GA1) - disarmament and international security
Issue: Re-evaluating the role of the UN as a global peace-keeper
Student Officer: Laetitia Kim
Position: Main Chair

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) is an intergovernmental organisation that seeks to maintain international peace, security and cooperation. As of today there are a total of 193 member states and 2 observer states in the United Nations. The United Nations was established after WWII in hopes of preventing future (world) wars and enhancing international cooperation and bonds between nations. The UN officially began their operations on 24 October 1945. The UN's peacekeeping missions started out small, including small armed and unarmed groups maintaining ceasefires and stabilising situations to leave room for diplomacy and peaceful resolutions. Since the Cold War, the budget for UN peacekeeping missions have tremendously increased and the UN has been able to resolve numerous conflicts and issues as a result of their peacekeeping missions. However, criticism of UN peacekeeping efforts persist. Many question the role the UN should play in world affairs and the effectiveness of peacekeeping missions. In this report, a brief history of the UN, an explanation of what peacekeeping missions entail, the successes and criticism of peacekeeping, and possible solutions will be elaborated on.

Definition of Key Terms

Peacekeeping
"Intended to help stop people fighting and prevent war or violence in a place where this is likely" (United Nations, n.d.)

The international community
"The international community is an imprecise phrase used in geopolitics and international relations to refer to a broad group of people and governments of the world" (Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, 2022)

UN peacekeepers
"Peacekeepers are civilian, military and police personnel all working together to keep the peace" (United Nations, n.d.)

SEA
SEA stands for sexual exploitation and abuse, mentioned in 'criticism on the UN'

"Sexual exploitation is defined as an actual or attempted abuse of someone's position of vulnerability (such as a person depending on you for survival, food rations, school, books, transport or other services), differential power or trust, to obtain sexual favours, including but not only, by offering money or other social, economic or political advantages. It includes trafficking and prostitution. Sexual abuse means the actual or threatened physical intrusion of a sexual nature, whether by force or under unequal or coercive conditions. It includes sexual slavery, pornography, child abuse and sexual assault." (UNHCR, The UN Refugee Agency, n.d.)

Intergovernmental
"Involving the governments of two or more countries" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.)

Human Rights
"One of the basic rights that everyone has to be treated fairly and not in a cruel way, especially by their government" (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.)

General Overview

History of the United Nations

On the 10th of January, 1920, an organisation for international cooperation was established as a response to the recently ended world war. The organisation was named the League of Nations and was established at the initiative of the allied forces. The devastating aftermath of WWI caused public demand for a way to prevent anything of the sorts from ever occurring once more. This led to the Paris Peace Conference in which a consensus was reached in a very short time on the text of the Covenant on the League of Nations. However, it is very clear that the organisation did not end successfully, as WWII occurred not long after WWI. Despite the failure of the League of Nations, it left a step in the right direction and the framework necessary for the United Nations.

The United Nations is perceived as the global peacekeeper, with 193 member states and 2 observer states participating and contributing to the organisation. After WWII a UN Charter was composed, which is the founding document for the UN. It was signed on 26 June 1945, at the United Nations Conference on International Organization, in San Francisco. The UN first started its operations on the 24th of October in 1945. Their main goal is the maintenance of international peace and security, by means such as, but not limited to: preventing conflict, strengthening international bonds, creating environments that allow for peace and lastly, deploying peacekeepers. The charter is considered an international treaty, which means UN members are bound to it. Thus the charter gives the intergovernmental organisation unique abilities in order to preserve peace and communication between nations. The creation of the charter started during WWII, in 1941. In 1945, negotiations on this 'World Organisation' continued at the Yalta Conference, attended by President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill and Premier Stalin. During the Yalta conference the three leaders decided to hold another conference in San Francisco, where the final draft of the charter was signed and went into effect only a few months later. The establishment of the UN is seen as the same date as when the charter went into effect, thus on the 24th of October in 1945.

The UN consists of 6 principal organs: Security Council (SC), General Assembly (GA), Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), Trusteeship Council (UNTC), International Court of Justice (ICJ) and the Secretariat.

Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping comes in many shapes and forms, however something they all have in common is that they are made to ensure peace and are of peaceful nature, include military troops from various countries and are led by the Security Council. Peacekeeping missions are only allowed with consent of the host government and all participating parties involved in the conflict at hand. Before any UN involvement takes place, discussion with the aforementioned is required to decide on the best response to the situation. Only after it is decided by the Security Council that a peacekeeping operation is the most appropriate action, a resolution will be created

entailing the operation mandate and size, of which the budget and resources need to be approved by the General Assembly.

International armed forces were first deployed in 1948 to form a type of 'barrier' between two or multiple parties during a ceasefire. The barrier allows room for negotiation, diplomacy and *peaceful* solutions to the conflict. This was officially named *peacekeeping* in 1956 during the Suez Crisis, which was an international crisis in the Middle East regarding the nationalising of the Suez Canal. This is called first-generation peacekeeping, in which forces are only allowed to employ force in self defence. However, the Cold War deeply disturbed UN workings in the first 45 years of its formation. Peacekeeping missions became much more complex. In order to still provide aid, second-generation peacekeeping was formed, in which not only armed forces were deployed, but also civilian experts, relief specialists, soldiers, etc. were deployed. In second-generation peacekeeping, forces were allowed to employ force not only in self-defence.

From 1990 onwards second-generation peacekeeping missions continued in areas of conflict. Members of the Security Council have created 'safe areas' wherever necessary and have authorised troops to defend these safe areas with force. However, sometimes the UN has taken sides in disputes, which goes against their own norm of maintaining neutrality. After the Cold War peacekeeping has expanded to more than only keeping peace, but also building peace, by for example supervising elections and holding peace negotiations. UN peacekeeping operations now include protecting civilians, facilitating political and constitutional processes, protection of Human Rights, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration of former combatants. The role of the UN moved further than only maintaining what was already there to creating peace and building upon it. The UN has also created the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPO). However, many have criticised UN involvement in, for example, refugee resettlements. The discussion of UN peacekeeping, -making and -building continues as does the discussion of what the role of the UN should really be.

Successes of the UN

The United Nations has undoubtedly saved the lives of countless people, resolved numerous conflicts and has created mandates to help towards global peace. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) is responsible for providing humanitarian assistance to people in need. With various other commissions, such as the World Food Program and UNICEF, the UN has been able to provide housing, medical aid, resources, vaccines, education, etc. to areas all around the world. Besides that, the UN has created an international standard for Human Rights with the various treaties, declarations and organisations created in the best interest of humanity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) defined the rights of all humans and allowed countries such as the USA to add such rights into their constitution in a comprehensive manner. The Human Rights Council was established to monitor and discuss human rights violations. Lastly, the UN General Assembly has passed multiple resolutions on decolonisation and the Declaration on the Granting of

Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples. The Special Committee on Decolonization also monitors territories who are not self-governing and provides aid wherever necessary. As mentioned previously, the UN's role in peacekeeping, making and building has expanded tremendously after the Cold War, including the amount of commissions, councils, programs, campaigns, etc. The UN now has countless subsidiary organs and specialised agencies for issues in the world such as climate change, gender inequality, LGBTQI+ rights, healthcare, etc. which are all there to work towards a better future.

Criticism on the UN

Enforcing created mandates is difficult for the UN because not a lot is legally binding. The power of the UN lies in what member states agree on and member states are very strongly opinionated on national sovereignty and are not required to listen at any time. Therefore, General Assembly resolutions are generally seen as recommendations rather than binding documents with consequences if not followed.

Due to the way the Security Council is established, it can take a very long time before any decisions are made regarding conflicts in the world. Veto powers simply disagree with one another often, which can lead to inaction within the Security Council. This allows for the continuation of human rights violations and crime, which could have been prevented, had the Security Council acted more timely. The same goes for the steps necessary for UN intervention in conflict zones. As previously mentioned, peacekeeping missions are only permitted with consent by those involved and authorisation by the Security Council. After that, many more steps must be taken until the peacekeeping operation actually takes place. All of these procedures add to the amount of time without any UN peacekeeping mission.

The UN is also perceived as a western-oriented organisation. According to Katelyn Balakir, "Both the IMF and World Bank condition loans on neoliberal features like trade liberalisation, private enterprise, and an overall reduction in public spending (i.e. the size of government)." A lot of (non-western) nations believe this western orientation of the UN can negatively impact the neutrality of UN peacekeeping missions.

Lastly, not all UN interventions are positive and peaceful. Enough reports have been made on UN peacekeepers exploiting and abusing certain groups. An example of this is the United Nations Stabilising Mission in Haiti, where between 2004 and 2007 over a hundred UN peacekeepers were reported to be sexually exploiting and abusing (SEA) children, of which none were criminally prosecuted for their actions. These peacekeepers are deployed in vulnerable conflict zones in order to preserve human rights, as human rights are regulated with more difficulties in such areas. Seeing as those areas already struggle with maintaining human rights, exploiting them becomes much easier than anywhere else.

The future of peacekeeping operations

The future of the UN and the UN peacekeeping operations is turbulent as the discussion on what the role of the UN should be in this day and age is intensifying. It is evident that the UN is facing many challenges as of late which will determine the course of the future for the UN.

As mentioned in 'criticism on the UN', the UN is not always able to fulfil their role of being global peacekeepers, in some scenarios even harming those they are meant to protect. All of these lead to protests against UN peacekeepers, and international support of the UN peacekeeping operations is decreasing, as is the budget. Both China and India are reserved when it comes to supporting UN peacekeeping operations, as are western countries such as the USA during and after the presidency of Trump. Lack of financial support restricts the UN and removes their ability to properly send humanitarian aid and resources. The emergence of the global pandemic has also set the UN back, forcing them to adapt to the changes that COVID brought with it.

However, attempts at recognising current issues and improving future peacekeeping operations can also be used to discredit the operations as a whole. Falling back on more simple techniques would be politically convenient and would fit the current budget better, however, it would reduce the role of the UN in other areas of peacekeeping and prevent the UN from giving aid in ways which are available now, such as in sustainable peacebuilding or human security. Overall, the lack of a clear objective in most operations, acts of misconduct by UN peacekeepers and prolonged decision-making are causing countries to distrust UN peacebuilding operations, which results in the lack of funds, which in return yield substandard results.

Major Parties Involved

The United Nations

The United Nations is the intergovernmental organisation that was established on the 24th of October in 1945. The goals of the organisation are to maintain peace and stability, increase international communication, cooperation and bonds and promote human rights. The United Nations was established as a response to WWII and the ineffectiveness of the League of Nations.

The Security Council

The Security Council is one of the six subsidiary organs of the United Nations and the council responsible for all peacekeeping operations. The Security Council consists of 15 members, of which 5 are permanent members and 10 non-permanent members. The 5 permanent members are The People's Republic of China (China), The Russian Federation (Russia), The United States of America (USA), The United Kingdom (UK) and The French Republic (France). All five of these countries possess a veto right. The 10 non-permanent members are elected every two years by the General Assembly

The League of Nations

The League of Nations was the predecessor of the United Nations and was established on the 10th of January in 1920 as a response to WWI. The goal of the League of Nations is similar to the goals of the United Nations, which is to maintain peace and stability and international relations. The League of Nations was deemed ineffective after another devastating World War and was discontinued with the establishment of the United Nations.

The United States of America (USA)

The USA provide 20% of the UN's budget and are thus the largest donor as of now. It goes without saying that the UN heavily relies on the USA to keep functioning as it does now. During Trump's presidency, USA credibility and reliability decreased as Trump withdrew from councils such as the HRC, UNESCO, nearly from the WHO and numerous agreements made in the past, such as those at the Paris Peace conference. The current president Joe Biden has recommitted, but the damage done to the credibility of the USA persists.

Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPO) and Department of Field Support (DFS)

The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPO) was responsible for giving peacekeeping operations direction and maintaining communication with the Security Council, troops, and financial contributors during the operations. The DPO goes all the way back to 1948 during the UN's first peacekeeping operations, however, the official DPO was formed in 1992 and was named Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPO). The DFS supports the UN in advisory, operational and transactional support services. The DPO and DFS both manage peacekeeping operations worldwide.

The Peacebuilding Commission (PBC)

The PBC is an intergovernmental advisory body that supports the UN and its efforts at creating peace in countries after being affected by conflict. The PBC consists of 31 member states elected by the GA, SC and ECOSOC and was established in 2005 by the GA and SC.

Timeline of Events

Date	Event
1914-1918	World War I
18 Jan 1919 - 21 Jan 1920	Paris Peace Conference
10 Jan 1920	The establishment of the League of Nations
1939-1945	World War II
26 Jun 1945	The signing of the UN charter
24 Oct 1945	The establishment of the United Nations
4 Feb 1945 - 11 Feb 1945	Yalta Conference
25 Apr 1945 – 26 Jun 1945	San Francisco Conference
10 Jan 1946 – 15 Dec 1946	General Assembly's first session
17 Jan 1946	Security Council's first session
1946	General Assembly's first resolution
May 1948	First peacekeeping operation UNTSO
10 Dec 1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)
1964	Cyprus peacekeeping force
22 Nov 1967	Resolution on the Middle East and South Africa
21 Mar 1990	Namibia's independence
24 May 1991	Eritrea's independence
24 Oct 1995	United Nations' 50th anniversary
7 Mar 2000	UN peacekeeping reformation (Brahimi report)
Sep 2000	Millennium Development Goals
15 Mar 2006	The establishment of the Human Rights Council (HRC)
2005	The establishment of the Peacebuilding Commission
11 Mar 2022	COVID-19

Previous attempts at solving the issue

The UN has mainly tried to solve this issue by evaluating and reforming UN peacekeeping operations, in order to improve their effectiveness, and limit the amount of trouble caused by the UN peacekeeping force, as for example has happened at the United Nations Stabilising Mission in Haiti. The a link to the website with all of these reports is in the section 'Useful Documents'.

One of the reports standing out is the Brahimi report on UN peacekeeping Reform. It is a study on UN peacekeeping operations. On the 7th of March of 2007 the secretary-general of the UN Kofi Annan appointed an independent blue ribbon panel led by Ambassador Lakhdar Brahimi of Algeria to conduct the study. Kofi Annan asked the panel to give recommendations as to how the peacekeeping operations could be improved on.

https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/a_55_305_e_brahimi_report.pdf

A second report standing out is Improving the performance and impact of UN peacekeeping operations by Alison Giffen, Center for Civilians in Conflict. This White Paper was written for the United Nations Peacekeeping Meeting in December 2021 in Seoul, Republic of Korea. In the paper, recommendations are given for the meeting of which the objective was to strengthen UN peacekeeping.

https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/ipi_giffen_wp_peacekeeping_performance.pdf

Possible solutions

Reevaluation of the role of the UN will be based on what each member state wishes the UN to become. Some member states will wish for the UN to keep their involvement in world affairs, while others wish for UN involvement to be kept to a minimum. In the end it all boils down to what each individual member state wants, needs and wishes to achieve through the UN. Keep in mind while taking a stance that the resolution will in the end have effect on the entire committee, not only your member state. Research your relations with other countries and in the case your stance is not as strong (so either very against or in favour of UN involvement) and attempt to align yourself with the opinions of member states that you have good relations with. Furthermore, think about what your country believes conflict-ridden countries and territories need from organisations such as the UN. Would involvement improve the situation or worsen it? If you decide that the UN should stay involved, attempt to resolve the increasing distrust in UN peacekeeping by tackling the reason for distrust in the first place. It is known that not all peacekeeping operations are successful and that misconduct is something that occurs from time to time. Attempt to seek solutions in order to create peaceful and reliable peacekeeping operations and legitimise the involvement by the UN. If you decide against, you can attempt to argue that the UN peacekeeping operations were much more effective when it was in its more simpler form, and that by complicating the procedures there is more room for misconduct. This will be a discussion of what the UN can do to improve situations in the world, and whether or not the UN should be this active in World Affairs. Do keep in mind that if you are against the involvement of the UN, it would only be logical that there is something else to ensure global peace and safety.

Useful documents

The UN Charter: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text

A very useful website with all Milestones in the UN: https://www.un.org/en/about-us/history-of-the-un/1941-1950

This website by Brittanica explains the history and workings of the UN in great detail: https://www.britannica.com/topic/United-Nations

On this website, mentioned in 'previous attempts at solving the issue' previous reformations and evaluations on the UN peacekeeping operations have been listed. It is composed by the United Nations: https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/reforming-peacekeeping

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