

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313833222>

The United Nations and its Peace Purpose: An Assessment

Article in *Journal of Conflictology* · May 2014

DOI: 10.7238/joc.v5i1.1827

CITATIONS

2

READS

3,293

1 author:



Ekpotuatin Charles Ariye
Keele University

6 PUBLICATIONS 6 CITATIONS

[SEE PROFILE](#)

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Nigerian Media Studies [View project](#)



Treaties as the Diplomatic Tool in the Pacification, Legalization and Colonization of the Lower Niger [View project](#)

ARTICLE


 The United Nations and its Peace

 Purpose: An Assessment

Ekpotuatin Charles Ariye

Submitted: May 2013

Accepted: November 2013

Published: May 2014


 Abstract

The study examined the United Nations through its various efforts and abilities to enthrone peace in the world. It adopted a developmental approach, bringing to light the UN's early attempts at peace, through the Cold War years and up to contemporary times. Taking into cognizance why the UN was established in the first place, and bearing in mind a clear conceptual understanding of peace, the study reveals that the UN's balance sheet with regard to this onerous responsibility is a mixed bag of admirable successes and colossal failures.


 Keywords

peace, United Nations, purpose, balance sheet, war, conflict

INTRODUCTION

Presently, the United Nations (UN) comprises 193 States.¹ As an international inter-governmental organization (IGO), it serves as a framework for cooperative problem solving amongst states, and in recent years has taken on additional political, social, economic and technological issues facing humanity in general. Its core concern with promoting peace and security has been supplemented, over time, by an ever-expanding economic and social agenda (Heywood, 2011:432). The UN has a very broad and substantive scope characterized by a decentralized system with several specialized agencies, organized around six principal organs, namely; the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the International

Court of Justice (ICJ), and the Secretariat (Feld, Jordan and Hurwitz, 1994: 48). The Security Council is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, dominated by the P5, the permanent veto power members: the United States of America (USA), Russia, China, the United Kingdom and France (Heywood, 2011: 432). This study examines the extent to which the UN had met its set peace purposes - purposes which are diverse. To this end, the discourse focuses on the aspect considered the prime aim of the apex body: 'peace'. Thus, a research question such as "to what extent has the UN achieved its peace purposes" is apt. The study is therefore structured along this line; Introduction, Evolution of the UN, Mandate/Purpose, Conceptualization of Peace, UN Peace efforts and initiatives, The Balance Sheet and Conclusion.

¹ Infoplease: <http://www.infoplease.com>. Retrieved 29/06/2013, 11.39pm.



EVOLUTION OF THE UNITED NATIONS

The need for some form of international body to streamline affairs between states is not unconnected with a desire to control or prevent the emergence of a hegemon. Early European attempts at international organization in the form of the principle of Collective Security, where nations must agree that, in matters which affect more than one, all would be bound by the decision arrived at by a common body, in which all states are in some way represented (Appadorai, 1975: 147), sum up the desire to curtail the rule of might. Collective security arrangements that characterized the European scene up to the outbreak of the First World War are direct pointers to attempts to institute a balance-of-power system, curtail a hegemon, and institute a rule of law to guide the conduct of nations. Such calls for a pan-control system had been identified as far back as 1791, when the circular of Count Kaunitz called for European Powers to unite to preserve public peace, the tranquility of state, the inviolability of possessions and the faith of treaties (Nicolson, 1963: 36). Unfortunately, all these efforts could not stop the outbreak and carnage of the First World War. It has been observed that these efforts were inadequate, lacking the permanence of an organization with a political character to unify the nations, settle disputes and avert war (Appadorai, 1975: 150). This was the general picture of events in Europe, leading to the establishment of the League of Nations at the end of the war in 1919.

The League was doomed from its inception, as the US stayed away from it, and its institutional frameworks lacked strength to prevent the outbreak of World War II. The horrors of the Second World War galvanized international statesmen to put in place a better framework than the League to foster peace and security in the world. As Feld, Jordan and Hurwitz (1994: 44) inform “the basic motivation for the establishment of the UN [...] was to avoid the devastating loss of life and property caused by the two World Wars”. The assumption was that, if the goal of peacefully settling international disputes could be attained, then the security of all states would be enhanced. Again, they inform that the need for such a global peacekeeping IGO was recognized as early as 1941, in the famous Atlantic Charter which was drafted by President Roosevelt of the United States and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (Feld, Jordan and Hurwitz, 1994). Similarly, Nye and Welch (2013: 200), offer that, “if the League of Nations was designed to prevent another World War I, the United Nations was designed in 1943-1945 to prevent a repeat of World War II”. Indeed, the fear of war, or its avoidance, was such a factor in the establishment of the UN that its ‘architects’ designed it (the UN) to be based on “the concept of the four policemen, the USA, USSR, the UK and China as protectors against a recurrence of Axis aggression” (Thompson and Snidal, 1999: 696). Heywood (2011) also shares this position. He avers that, “it is a known fact that

both the League and the UN were set up in the aftermath of World Wars with their key goals being to promote international security and the peaceful settlement of disputes.” Fundamental to this point is the basic understanding of the opening sentences of the UN Charter. In its preamble, it clearly states: “we the Peoples of the United Nations determined ‘to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind’ [...]”. It is incontrovertible that the fear of war, its consequences, carnage and therefore, a desire to avoid its occurrence and maintenance of peace and security in the World, constituted the main motivating forces for the establishment of the United Nations in 1945.

UNDERSTANDING THE UN MANDATE/PURPOSE

The victorious allies that established the UN drew up an elaborate Charter of 19 chapters. Its terms of reference, according to Nye and Welch (2013), “include innovations to repair the deficiencies of the League” and “reconstitute some of the League’s Organs” (Nel and McGowan, 1999: 112). Thus, one of its key features is to make the offensive use of force, by any member state, illegal. We can recall that, under the League system, a Collective Security System was provided, whereby an act of war would bring political, economic, and possibly military sanctions against the aggressor. However, the League’s failure culminated in the outbreak of World War II, foreshadowed by its ineffectiveness in Manchuria and Ethiopia (Diehl, 1988). Consequently, the framers of the UN, conscious of the shortcomings of the League, desired that states could use force only for self-defense, collective self-defense, and collective security. The following are the Purposes of the UN, as stated in Article 1, Chapter I of its Charter:

- 1) To maintain international peace and security, and to that end: to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to the peace, and for the suppression of acts of aggression or other breaches of the peace, and to bring about by peaceful means, and in conformity with the principles of justice and international law, adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace;
- 2) To develop friendly relations among nations based on respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, and to take other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace;
- 3) To achieve international cooperation in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character, and in promoting and encouraging respect for human rights and for



fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion; and

- 4) To be a center for harmonizing the actions of nations in the attainment of these common ends. (The United Nations Charter).

It is discernible that concern for world peace is a dominant theme in the United Nations system. I will now discuss the concept of *peace* and relate it to the ideas put forward in this article.

PEACE CONCEPTUALIZED

Extant perspectives on peace emphasize positive and negative peace, as well as the explanation of peace as a condition and as a process. According to Udoh and Umoh (2011), because of what peace means to our globalised world, scholars in the field have difficulty finding just a single word to describe it. Similarly, Strazzari (2008) echoes that, almost 50 years after the first steps of peace research, peace remains essentially a contested concept, entailing endless disputes over its meaning. This view is also shared by Galtung (1969), and Richmond (2007). The former offers that, “nobody has the monopoly on defining peace”, while the latter explains that the “concept of peace is ontologically unstable and essentially contested”. According to Howard (2001), this contested nature of peace may not be unconnected with the fact that the concept is “a relatively recent idea compared to conflict which has received greater attention and knowledge because of its prevalence over time”. Be that as it may, there is a plethora of definitions of peace.

In Miller’s (2003) view, peace is “a political condition that makes justice possible.” The point is that societies where people can get easy access to justice for wrongs done are said to be in a state of peace. David Francis (2006) gives us six explanations for a condition of peace, in the following order: “Peace as the absence of war; peace as justice and as development; peace as respect and tolerance between and amongst people; peace as ‘GAIA’, a balance in and with the ecosphere; peace as inner peace – spiritual peace; and, peace as wholeness and making whole.” For Udoh and Umoh, peace lacks a universal denominator, therefore peace to one society may not be peace to another. They emphasize that, for instance, “a society fragmented and polarized by perpetual war and armed conflicts will interpret peace as the absence of war. Whereas a political community driven by unjust structures and policies will equate peace with justice and freedom, while people suffering material deprivation and poverty will inevitably perceive peace in terms of equity, development and access to existential necessities of life”. In Sugata Dasgupta’s (1968) exploration of peace, issues of famines, poverty, underdevelopment and human rights abuses are all part of the peace value and sphere.

He opines that peace and war are in a zero-sum relationship, and as such, the absence of war should not be taken as the presence of peace. He adds that “new peace values such as economic prosperity – or lack of it, and physical health are incorporated into the [...] concept of peace as necessary components or conditions of peace” (Dasgupta, 1968: 19-42).

These views indicate that peace is not necessarily the absence of war, but rather addresses the root causes of conflict. This informed the UN’s Agenda for Peace Programme in the early 1990s, in which it (UN) identified peacebuilding as a tool for supporting structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict (Boutros-Ghali, 1992). The presence of economic and social problems in society suggests a lack of peace, as explained by Dasgupta. This general exposition of peace, will subsequently direct our evaluation of the UN and its avowed peace objective.

UN PEACE EFFORTS/INITIATIVES

The UN was plunged almost immediately into uncertain waters as the emergent Cold War rendered it ineffective in dealing with its responsibilities. The Cold War fostered bloc-based military alliances on the global scene, underscored by a nuclear arms race and possible mutually assured destruction. The very fear of war, which had midwifed the UN, once again stared grimly at the world. Irrespective of this backdrop, the UN got involved in numerous peace-related ventures bordering on conflict prevention and resolution. However, Cold War rivalries ensured that it could not stop interstate and intrastate wars; at best, it could only mediate and supervise ceasefires, taking on the culture and responsibility of peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding. It should be noted that, the UN’s peace efforts and initiatives over time were guided by provisions in its Charter. Chapters one and seven contain numerous articles on the subject of maintenance of global peace and on appropriate steps to be taken with regard to threats to peace, breaches and acts of aggression. In recent years it has guided its peace endeavour with novel ideas such as its Agenda for Peace initiative and the Doctrine of Responsibility to Protect. I will now turn to UN peace efforts, bearing in mind, our understanding of peace.

As of 31, January 2013, the UN peace initiatives around the world, from 1948, stood at 67. By 2009, 16 of these efforts remained active, involving 80,000 troops, almost 11,000 uniformed policemen and about 2,300 military observers drawn from 117 countries (Heywood, 2011: 444). Additionally, its operations were supported by 6,000 international civilian personnel, 13,000 local civilian personnel and over 2,000 volunteer workers, with the budget for its 2008-09 operations alone amounting to 7.1 billion dollars.



The UN has faced numerous tests over the years. Its litmus test came in the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948. We can recall that in 1947, a special UN Committee suggested the creation of an Arab State, a Jewish State and a UN administered Jerusalem out of partitioned Palestine. Whereas the Jews accepted this offer, the Arabs were totally against it (Armstrong, Lloyd, and Redmond, 2004). In the ensuing first Arab-Israeli War, the bloodletting warranted sending in of an unarmed UN team under the aegis of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organisation (UNTSO).

Similarly, the hasty partition of India and Pakistan heralded conflict between the two new states over Kashmir in 1947, following British withdrawal. The UN was able to broker a cease-fire by January 1949 and subsequently deployed a military observer group (UNMOGIP) to maintain the cease-fire. Again, in a dispute arising out of colonialism in 1949, the UN played a mediatory role between the Dutch and Indonesia, leading to the independence of the latter. It played a similar role that led to independence for the former Italian colonies of Libya, Somaliland and Eritrea. From this time, the UN took on a political role, rather than just its peacekeeping one. This paradigm shift clearly conforms with some conceptualizations of peace examined earlier.

The belief in and value placed on preventive diplomacy by former Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld strongly influenced the UN to vigorously pursue the peacekeeping option as an approach to peace. Thus, the UN adopted a fourfold characteristic of peacekeeping as its yardstick. These became; the understanding that operational personnel are to be drawn from armed forces of UN Member States with no interest in a dispute and such deployed forces are to adopt a non-threatening and impartial approach; use weapons only in self defense and assert freedom of movement; its functions are to defuse tensions, calm and settle or resolve the dispute; and that, deployment of forces must be based on the cooperation of the disputants who must give their consent, and the force can be removed if consent is withdrawn (Goulding, 1991), (Armstrong, Lloyd, and Redmond, 2004). Consequently, between 1949 and the end of the 1980s, the UN directed 16 operations, with differing challenges and responsibilities. Whereas, a few were core peacekeeping operations, others were emergency interventions, observer groups and even transition monitoring and assistance operations. A select few are highlighted below.

Following the Suez crises of 1956, in which Egypt was made to face British, French and Israeli Forces, the UN, through a General Assembly United for Peace procedure, which enabled it to bypass the British and French vetoes in the Security Council, sent in a 6,000 strong (UNEF I) Force to the Sinai, as a buffer between Egyptian and Israeli forces. This Emergency Force also facilitated

the withdrawal of British and French forces from the Canal Zone and remained until 1967 (Heywood, 2011).

The Belgian-Congo crisis of 1960-63, provided another avenue for the UN to intervene in an intrastate conflict, to make peace. Belgium had unilaterally intervened to restore order, more as a post-colonial responsibility. However, the escalation of the crisis in the form of Katanga's secessionist bid compelled the Congolese government to call on the UN to assist. The UN, upon getting Security Council authorization, dutifully sent in a 20,000 strong peacekeeping force which was able to supervise the withdrawal of Belgian forces and restore normalcy to the Congo. Again, by 1973, the UN was compelled to send in another Emergency Force, (UNEF II), to stand as a buffer between Israel and the Arab nations. Also, in 1988, the UN brokered a cease-fire and withdrawal of forces between Iran and Iraq following their bitter and long war.

The intrigues of the Cold War limited the UN's ability to act (Armstrong, Lloyd, and Redmond, 2004). During this period, the UN could not intervene in many conflict situations such as Guatemala 1954, Panama 1964, and Dominican Republic 1965 (Feld, Jordan and Hurwitz, 1994). In these cases, the United States of America insisted that they were Organisation of American States (OAS) issues not meant for the Security Council. Similarly, the Soviet Union denied the Security Council's competence to deal with the Hungarian and Czechoslovakia uprisings of 1956 and 1968, contending that these matters were Warsaw Pact issues. The UN was also unable to handle the French policy in Algeria. This inability of the UN to act decisively in the face of Super Power squabbles, informed some observers to conclude that during this period, "it had little relevance and was shunted to the margins" (Armstrong, Lloyd, and Redmond, 2004). In buttressing this point, former Secretary General Boutros Ghali (1992: 2) admitted that "since the creation of the UN in 1945 [...] the UN was rendered powerless to deal with many [...] crisis because of the vetoes – 279 of them – cast in the Security Council, which were [...] vivid expressions of the divisions of that period".

The post-Cold War years provided the UN with an opportunity to reexamine its role in the resolution of conflicts and peacekeeping. In one view, "for the first time, since the establishment of the UN, the basic structure of bipolar confrontations between the two power blocs fast disappeared, and that, somewhat paradoxically, the need for controlling new conflicts emanating from a variety of factors, such as ambition for hegemony, or rivalry on ethnic and religious grounds [...], had become all the more greater" (Owada, 1991). The test case came in the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. In the ensuing Persian Gulf War² of 1991, the US and the Soviets cooperated to achieve UN Security

2 The Persian Gulf War is regarded as a triumph of Collective Security. It was a demonstration of the UN to renew its capacity to fulfill its obligation of deterring aggression and maintaining world peace. However, the second Gulf War of 2003 did not get UN backing.



Council objectives, even though, according to Wong Kan Seng (1991), there were different pulls in the final days of the war. Subsequently the UN maintained an Observer Mission (UNIKOM) between Iraq and Kuwait until 2003.

The UN increasingly involved itself in the non-military aspects of peacekeeping, as the bulk of its up to 50 missions between the early 1990s and 2012 centered on the provision of emergency relief, political reconstruction and peacebuilding, not only in war ravaged states, but also in those faced with humanitarian disasters occasioned by natural causes, such as Haiti. The UN's referenda and transitional authority responsibilities in Western Sahara, Cambodia, Kosovo, Slovenia and East Timor, are but a few pointers to its ever increasing humanitarian peace projects, with peace building support services retained in most peacekeeping missions to reinforce the peace process and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law (Armstrong, Lloyd, and Redmond, 2004).

It has been observed (Armstrong, Lloyd and Redmond, 2004; Weiss and Forsythe, 1997) that the end of the Cold War increased the commonality of interests between states, such that most states turned to the UN to tackle the myriad of turbulence, volatility, strife, and ethnic and religious turmoil that characterized the world stage. Furley and May (1998: 4) inform that "as conflicts arise, the international community and regional organizations find themselves drawn into ever more challenging and long drawn out efforts to oversee and assist in the implementation of peace agreements". From this time, three times as many peace agreements have been signed as in the previous three decades (Armstrong, Lloyd, and Redmond, 2004). Ultimately, UN efforts restored peace by way of winding down high profile international conflicts such as Namibia, 1990, Angola, 1991 and Afghanistan, 1989, Central African Republic in 2000 and demobilization of a rebel army in Mozambique and Somalia in 1994, and Sierra Leone in 2000.

Post-Cold War peace initiatives necessitated a synergistic collaboration between the UN and regional organizations. By the 1990s, the UN was working with the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and the European Union (EU) to, intervene and restore peace and provide humanitarian assistance in Liberia and the rump state of the former Yugoslavia. In underscoring the importance of regional arrangements on the peace agenda, in a speech, former Secretary General Boutros-Ghali observed the following: "the UN has never claimed that it alone can carry out peacekeeping operations [...] It is more likely [...], to be seen as having the impartiality which is

an essential condition for successful peacekeeping [...]. But the demand has become such that I believe that the UN must share the work with others. A multipolar world should be led by a multiplicity of institutions [...]. It is therefore logical that an effort should be made to decentralize the responsibilities for peacekeeping and peacemaking that today are continuously being entrusted to the UN. The regional organizations are the obvious candidates for larger roles [...]. Their involvement will in turn serve to promote the democratization of international relations." (Feld, Jordan and Hurwitz, 1994: 209-210).

This position by Boutros-Ghali and the quest for world peace is in tandem with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter, which envisaged a role for regional bodies in dealing with matters relating to the maintenance of international peace. Recent events in Libya which led to the collapse of the Ghaddafi regime, under the auspices of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) led intervention, and the efforts of French and African Troops in Mali, underpin the role of regional bodies and the responsibility to protect doctrine,³ which has recently been relied upon to address conflict situations and in complementing the UN in the maintenance of international peace. Moreover, the concept of peace has been further expanded in contemporary times, as a means of justifying and tackling terrorism and support for it. Following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center in New York, "UN resolutions (SCR 1368 and SCR1373), were used against the Taleban regime in Afghanistan, and for banning all forms of support for terrorism" (Armstrong, Lloyd, and Redmond, 2004).

Additionally, global dynamics and dimensions of conflict situations continue to define and expand the peace role of the UN. Its non-military activities have increased over the years, to the extent that its other specialized agencies, especially those under the ECOSOC, are increasingly involved in the area of preventive diplomacy, through humanitarian interventions, poverty alleviation and health matters, designed to stem the occurrence of conflict and lower the level of tensions, especially in weak and failing states. Heywood (2011: 442) sums up this outlook of the UN as follows: "the UN's role used to be to keep the peace in a world dominated by conflict between communism and capitalism. Now, it is forced to find a new role in a world structured by the dynamics of global capitalism, in which conflict increasingly arises from imbalances in the distribution of wealth and resources. This has meant that the UN's role in promoting peace [...] has been conflated with the task of ensuring economic and social development, the two being merged in the shift from traditional

3 Initiated in 2005 by the UN, The Responsibility to Protect is based on the idea that sovereignty is not a right, but a responsibility. This principle was applied in the Libyan crisis through (UNSC) Resolution 1973, which led to the overthrow of the Ghaddafi regime in 2011.



peacekeeping to multidimensional or robust peacekeeping". With this general understanding of the efforts of the UN, I now proceed to do an evaluation to ascertain how much success the UN has achieved.

THE UN BALANCE SHEET/ ASSESSMENT

It is significant to try to know aspects where the UN recorded appreciable successes and glaring and ubiquitous failures in its peace objective. This is to avoid indulging in wholesale condemnation of its efforts, taking into cognizance the prevailing circumstances in which it had been operating since 1945. Therefore for Heywood (2011), the performance of the UN can largely be seen in terms of the extent to which it has saved humanity from deadly conflicts, and the fact that World War III has not occurred should be seen as the supreme achievement of the UN. But, Heywood is quick to add the Realists view that the non-outbreak of a third World War is not a result of any effort by the UN, but rather more a consequence of the balance of terror of nuclear weapons possessed by East and West. Irrespective of this, Heywood offers that, "ultimately how global and regional conflict would have developed and whether Cold Wars would have become hot ones in the absence of the UN is unanswerable".

Feld, Jordan and Hurwitz (1994), consider the achievements of the UN mixed. To them, if confined essentially to providing mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of international conflicts and maintenance of peace, the UN's record is: Undoubted success in negotiating a cease-fire between India and Pakistan in 1959; bringing about peace in the Belgian Congo in 1960; mediating and resolving the dispute between the Dutch and Indonesia over West Irian (New Guinea) in 1962; economic sanctions on the white minority regime in Rhodesia for its unilateral declaration of independence in 1966; imposition of arms embargo on the apartheid regime in South Africa; and non-military efforts in Namibia beginning in 1976, involving supervision of free and fair elections that led to the independence of the country. The following are also part of the UN's appreciable efforts: Successful implementation of internationally supervised elections in Nicaragua, successive missions that restored peace in Angola, Cambodia, Mozambique, Haiti, Guatemala, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Cote d'Ivoire, and the efforts that led to the two new independent states of South Sudan and East Timor. The spectacular successes of regional collaboration with the UN, in the cases of ECOWAS and NATO in Liberia, Sierra Leone and the former Yugoslavia respectively, are pluses in the peace score card of the UN.

On the Humanitarian side, the UN's specialized agencies, WHO, UNICEF, UNHCR, WFP, and the UNDP, have,

over the years, all played appreciable roles in complementing the UN's peace efforts. For instance, WHO and UNICEF brokered cease-fires to allow immunization campaigns to be conducted in countries affected by conflicts. Again, WHO's other notable emergency missions related to peacekeeping include its efforts in: Democratic People's Republic of Korea (1996), Liberia (1996), Rwanda (1995), Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Angola, and the former Yugoslavia. In all these cases, the central idea was to bring together former enemies under the 'bridge for peace' initiative, with a view toward achieving reconciliation and consolidation of peace (Beigbeder 1999).

Despite the above, one must be guided by the words of Fedotov (1991) in making a balanced assessment. According to him, "it is too simplistic to portray UN peacekeeping operations in bright colours alone [...]. In some cases, the presence of UN observers for many years has, at best, been limited to monitoring the 'freezing' of conflicts and is not yet fully used to assist active negotiating processes". The cases of Lebanon, Kashmir and Cyprus are cited as examples where peace is still elusive. Indeed, on the Cyprus question, Feldman (1991) observes that "the possibility for a solution to the quarter-century-old problem, is neither enhanced nor retarded by the end of the Cold War". Clearly, arguments about the UN's paralysis for much of the Cold War period cannot be advanced for the continuous abating of the Cyprus question. Similarly, Mehta (2013) avers that, "the history of the UN peacekeeping is a mixed bag with successes in Cambodia, Mozambique, Haiti and Timor-Leste with failures in Rwanda, Kivu in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Darfur in Sudan and Afghanistan".

The UN was a powerless spectator in the 1962 Cuban missile crisis that nearly plunged the world into a nuclear war, just as it could not earlier, in 1956, 1968 and 1979, prevent the then Soviet Union from invading Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Afghanistan respectively. Also, it could not stop the United States from involvement in Vietnam in the 1960s and 1970s, and has equally had little influence on the succession of Arab-Israeli wars (Heywood, 2011). Whereas, in 2011, the UN Security Council authorized military intervention in the Libyan Civil War on the basis of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect, it failed earlier in 1991 to authorize NATO to intervene in Kosovo under what were very similar circumstances to the Libyan case (Mehta, 2013).

What may be deemed as total failures in UN peace efforts are the triple cases of Somalia, Rwanda and Bosnia. According to Armstrong, Lloyd, and Redmond (2004), there were disillusionments around the world following the failures of the UN in these instances. This view is also held by scholars such as Kobak (1997), Carey (1998), Oliver (1997), Diehl (1994) and Clark (1993), who all share the notion that the UN was bogged down by institutional and bureaucratic bottlenecks which affected early and decisive intervention and mediation in these instances,



thereby leading to the inability to protect civilian populations and to put a halt to the wanton killings. Significantly, the UN was accused of being a bystander to genocide in the shameful cases of Rwanda and Srebrenica in 1993. Indeed, these failures prompted the UN to do a self-assessment and commissioned the Brahimi Panel to examine its peace operations. In its exhaustive report, this panel dealt with all the underlying causes of failed UN missions in the past, and called for greater and earlier use of the powers of the Secretary General of the UN to “deploy fact-finding Missions to potential trouble spots well before the situation reaches a crisis stage” (Brahimi Report, 2000: 4).

Clearly the UN's peace efforts can not be classified as having been a wholesale success story. That is not the case here, but one can draw inferences from the preceding that, while the UN made appreciable success in some spheres of its peace activities, it clearly did not measure up to its purpose in several other instances. However we can take solace in the words of Collier and Hoeffler (2004) that, “UN peacekeeping has been both effective and cost effective when compared with the costs of conflicts and the toll

in lives and economic devastation”. Indeed the very first peacekeeping operation (UNTSO), in 1948, claimed the life of the UN mediator, Count Bernadette of Sweden.

CONCLUSION

I have examined the rationale behind the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 and an x-ray of its successes and failures with regard to its peace purpose. The study has cursorily conceptualized peace and applied it as a framework in understanding the UN's peace efforts and initiatives since 1948. The emergent picture is that first the UN came into being because of the fear of war and its consequences. Second, the UN, despite the constraints imposed on it by Cold War rivalries, has been able to make appreciable efforts in enthroning peace in the world through its various peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding programs, which by 2013 stood at 67, with 15 still ongoing, and some having been started several decades ago. ■

■ References

- APPADORAI, A.** (1975). *The substance of politics*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- ARMSTRONG, D.; LLOYD, L.; REDMOND, J.** (2004). *International organization in world politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- BEIGBEDER, Y.** (1999). “The World Health Organization and peacekeeping”. In: J. WHITMAN (ed.). *Peacekeeping and the UN agencies*. London: Frankcass.
- BOUTROS-GHALI, B.** (1992). *An agenda for peace: preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping*. New York: United Nations.
- Brahimi Report* (2000). Report of the Panel on the United Nations peace operations. New York: United Nations, General Assembly and Security Council.
http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/55/305
- CAREY, M.** (1998). “Peacekeeping in Africa: recent revolution and prospects”. In: O. FURLEY; R. MAY (eds.). *Peacekeeping in Africa*. Sydney: Ashgate.
- Charter of the United Nations* (1945).
<https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/ctc/uncharter.pdf>
- CLARK, J.** (1993) “Debate in Somalia: failure of the collective response” In: L. F. DAMROSCH (ed.). *Enforcing restraint: collective intervention in internal conflicts*. New York: Council on Foreign Relations.
- COLLIER, P.; HOFFFLER, A.** (2004). “Greed and grievance in civil wars”. *Oxford Economic Papers*. Vol. 56, No. 4.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpf064>
- DASGUPTA, S.** (1968). “Peacelessness and maldevelopment: a new theme for peace research in developing nations”. *Proceedings of the International Peace Research Association, second Conference*. Vol. 2, pp. 19-42.
- DIEHL, P. F.** (1988). “Peacekeeping operations and the quest for peace”. *Political Science Quarterly*. Vol. 103, No. 3, pp.485-507.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2150760>
- DIEHL, P. F.** (1994). *International peacekeeping*. Baltimore: John Hopkins Press.
- FEDOTOV, Y.** (1991). “The United Nations and conflict resolution” In: *The Singapore Symposium on the Changing Role of the United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping*, 13-15 March.



- FELD, W. J.; JORDAN, R. S.; HURWITZ, L.** (1994). *International organizations: a comparative approach*. London: Praeger.
- FELDMAN, H. J.** (1991). "The United Nations and conflict resolution". In: *The Singapore Symposium on the Changing Role of the United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping*, 13-15 March.
- FRANCIS, D. J.** (2006). "Peace and conflict studies: an african overview of basic concept". In: S. G. BEST (ed.). *Introduction to peace and conflict studies in West Africa: a reader*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- FURLEY, O.; MAY, R.** (eds.) (1998). "Introduction" In: *Peacekeeping in Africa*. Sydney: Ashgate.
- GALTUNG, J.** (1969). "Violence, peace and peace research". *Journal of Peace Research*. Vol. 6, No. 3, pp. 167-191. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/002234336900600301>
- GOULDING, M.** (1991). "The evolving role of the United Nations peacekeeping operations". In: *The Singapore Symposium on the Changing Role of the United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping*, 13-15 March.
- HEYWOOD, A.** (2011). *Global politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- HOWARD, M.** (2001). *The invention of peace: reflections on war and international order*. London: Yale University Press.
- KOBAK, D.** (1997). "Rwanda: never again?". In: R. VON LIPSEY (ed.). *Breaking the cycle*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- MEHTA, V.** (2013). "Beyond enforcing the peace: the role of troops in reconstruction". Paper presented in North-western University Conference on Human Rights, 17-19 January.
- MILLER, C.** (2003). *A glossary of terms and concepts in peace and conflict studies*. Geneva: University for Peace. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327949pac0904_5
- NEL, P.; MCGOWAN, P. J.** (1999). *Power, wealth and global order: an international relations textbook for Africa*. Cape Town: University Press.
- NICOLSON, H.** (sir) (1963). *Diplomacy*. Washington DC: Institute for the Study of Diplomacy.
- NYE, J. S.; WELCH, D. A.** (2013). *Understanding global conflict and cooperation: an introduction to theory and history*. Boston: Pearson.
- OLIVER, A.** (1997). "The Somalia syndrome". In: R. VON LIPSEY (ed.). *Breaking the cycle*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- OWADA, H.** (1991). "Opening address". In: *The Singapore Symposium on the Changing Role of the United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping*, 13-15 March.
- RICHMOND, O. P.** (2007). *The transformation of peace*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- SENG, W. K.** (1991). "Opening address". In: *The Singapore Symposium on the Changing Role of the United Nations in Conflict Resolution and Peacekeeping*, 13-15 March.
- STRAZZARI, F.** (2008). "Between 'messy aftermath' and 'frozen conflicts': chimera and realities of sustainable peace". *HUMSEC Journal*. Issue 2, pp. 45-66.
- THOMPSON, A.; SNIDAL, D.** (1999). *International organization*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- UDOH, I. G.; UMOH, E. U.** (2011). "The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis and the conceptualisation of peace using adjectives". *Journal of Conflictology*. Vol. 2, No. 2. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7238/joc.v2i2.1304>
- WEISS, T.; FORSYTHE, D.** (1997). *The United Nations and changing world politics*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.



■ Recommended citation

ARIYE, Ekpotuatin Charles (2014). "The United Nations and its Peace Purpose: An Assessment" [online article]. *Journal of Conflictology*. Vol. 5, Iss. 1, pp. 24-32. Campus for Peace, UOC. [Consulted: dd/mm/yy].

<http://www.uoc.edu/ojs/index.php/journal-of-conflictology/article/view/vol5iss1-ariye/vol5iss1-ariye-en>

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.7238/joc.v5i1.1827>

ISSN 2013-8857



The texts published in this journal are – unless indicated otherwise – covered by the Creative Commons Spain Attribution 3.0 licence. You may copy, distribute, transmit and adapt the work, provided you attribute it (authorship, journal name, publisher) in the manner specified by the author(s) or licensor(s). The full text of the licence can be consulted here: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/es/deed.en>.

■ About the author

Ekpotuatin Charles Ariye
ariyecharles@yahoo.com

E.C. Ariye is a Lecturer in History and International Studies at the Isaac Jasper Boro College of Education, Sagbama, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. At present, he is a postgraduate student at Keele University, Newcastle, specializing in Diplomacy. His Research interests revolve around Diplomatic and Imperial History, International Organizations, Law, and Peace and Conflict Studies.



**CAMPUS
FOR PEACE**

