

Can international institutions help make the world more peaceful?

Written by Sophie Crockett

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SOPHIE CROCKETT, MAR 22 2011

The development of international institutions is one of the most admirable efforts for the achievement of world peace that the world has ever seen. It possesses many of the qualities of the liberalist ideal, however, it has not fulfilled its aim to make the international community a more peaceful place.

There have been many efforts to establish an effective global institution that would be able to integrate and promote cooperation between its members. Up to now, the most notable international organization for analysis is the United Nations (UN). However, it is also important to note other extremely significant institutions that assist in making the world more peaceful by providing economic stability, cooperation and growth in the global south such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, Group of 20 (G20) and others. This also eventually leads into peaceful relations between states. However, for the purpose of this short analysis, this paper will focus only on the United Nations. The UN currently has 192 member states, which means every sovereign country in the world is affiliated to it, thus making it the most widely represented institution to examine. (Archer: 2001: 25) This paper will analyse two different cases in which the United Nations has succeeded and failed in its objective to establish peace in regions of the world. The first case is the Civil War in Mozambique and UN intervention and deployment of the ONUMOZ mission in October 1992. This example shows how the United Nations' work was unparalleled in scope, and intrinsic for the establishment of peace in Mozambique. (Weinstein: 2002: 142) This case will further argue that in fact that 'institutions promote dialogue and learning among states allowing them to rethink their security priorities and behaviour, and embark upon collaborative ventures.' (Deutsch: 1957) In contrast, the second case will be that of Israel and the situation in the Middle East including its position within the United Nations, where it is accused of violations against human rights and of crimes against humanity regarding their treatment of Palestinian civilians and citizens. (PLO Negotiations Affairs Department: 2002) This shows the ways in which the United Nations has failed in its attempt to establish peace in areas of conflict in the Middle East. Furthermore, the paper will use a critical reflection and evaluation of these cases to try to understand why and how the UN has failed in its goal of making the world more peaceful and how it 'fundamentally lacks the capacity to act predictably on its core mission: to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.' (Ruggie: 2003)

Historical Context:

Before analysing the case studies of United Nations successes and failures, an examination on the emergence of international institutions such as the United Nations, must be made to understand how they developed over time. The rise of international institutions came in the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference, where representatives of the victorious nations of World War I gathered together to write a treaty that would essentially bring peace to Europe. (Archer: 2001: 14) There was much controversy with regards to the establishment of a League that would act as a promoter of co-operation, peace and security in the world. This idea consequently failed due to lack of support from other nations, as it favoured the allied countries and failed in its attempts to intervene in situations of conflict. (Ibid: 15) However, after the Second World War, in 1945, another international system emerged. This system was still based on the sovereignty of states, but this time, the European method that had previously been challenged was changed to suit the new demands. This adaptation gained a lot of support, especially as the world had seen a substantial increase in the number of nations, which consequently expanded the UN and transformed it into the

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international institution it is today. (Archer: 2001: 25) Whether it is a success or a failure is subject to different interpretations, and their values and decisions will always be a controversial topic amongst its members. (Higgott: 2006)

Many theorists of international relations, especially those who follow the realist school of thought, are sceptical about the effectiveness of the United Nations as an institutional framework for promoting peace, even though they recognize its noble intention. "In the middle ground are those who see institutions as serving useful purposes in situations of interdependence, allowing states to benefit from common rules and procedures (...) At the other end of the spectrum are those express scepticism as to whether institutions, of any type, promote security and international order" (Mearsheimer: 1994/95).

Mozambique and UN intervention

The intervention in Mozambique is seen as one of the most successful intervention stories for the United Nations. When the matter is intervention, many question the impartiality of the UN, but in fact, impartiality does not entail neutrality 'in the face of evil' but a strong and fair adherence to the principles of the UN Charter, and the organization, regardless of its faults, achieved this in Mozambique. (Shawcross: 2001: 322) The civil war first broke out in 1977 when the RENAMO, Mozambique Resistance Movement, was formed to oppose the FRELIMO Government, Front for Liberation of Mozambique, which was in power at the time. Over 900,000 people died in battle and from starvation as well as 5 million being displaced. (Scaruffi: 2009) The conflict finally ended in 1992 after the United Nations intervened and a General Peace Accord was reached with its support. On October 15, 1992, a peacekeeping force of 7,500 soldiers arrived in the country to oversee the two-year transition to democracy. The agreement was seen as already being 'an achievement in itself' but the transformation of this agreement into practice would be a much more complex task. (Solomon in Synge, 1997: vii) During the 'experience of Mozambique', the United Nations managed to achieve one of its 'rare peacekeeping successes'. The ONUMOZ (United Nations Operation in Mozambique) delivered an important message and example of the ways in which a peacekeeping mission should be conducted on behalf of the international community. If it weren't for the United Nations, then the outcome of the civil war would have been very different, if not disastrous. (Synge: 1997: 3-5) *International assistance provided financial incentives for soldiers to demobilize and for RENAMO's leadership to end the conflict. The UN can rightfully claim credit for much of this transformation. UN funds, technical expertise, and staff time nurtured Mozambique's transition, demonstrating the payoff that can come from making a sustained commitment in a country moving toward peace.* (Weinstein: 2002: 150) The Security Council, arguably the council that has come closest to a global governing force, was responsible for setting up the operation in Mozambique. This demonstrated the council's increasing desire for getting involved in 'the process of reconstructing existing states'. (Luck: 2007: 40) The reconstruction of regimes that have broken down or stabilising states in conflict through the intervention United Nations was successful not only in Mozambique, but is also an example of how the UN can bring peace and stabilize countries in conflict. (Ibid: 35) Many liberalists argue the idea that states are fundamentally cooperative in nature and further; neo-liberalists argue the idea that international institutions allow states to effectively cooperate in the international system. Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye argue that relationships between states are illustrated by 'complex interdependence' and when there is a high degree of interdependence, states require international institutions to be set up and resolve issues between states. This means such institutions 'promote cooperation' by delivering information and lowering costs. (Jackson and Sørensen: 2007: 44) Similar cases of UN intervention can also be observed in El Salvador, Cambodia, Guatemala and Tajikistan where scholar Fen Hampson draws attention to the ingredients that contributed to the success of these particular cases: 'the breadth and depth of Council support; the ability to back mediation efforts with a credible capacity for rewards or punishments; having the right personnel involved; and having had previous success in the region.' (Hampson in Price and Zacher: 2004: 75-92)

In spite of the arguments above, there are still those who are sceptical about UN effectiveness in Mozambique and other acclaimed successes of the organization. There are still a number of cleavages that threaten the newly democratic state of Mozambique. The risk of conflict and instability is rooted in the violent past of the country, and this risk alone is enough to cause grave concern within the United Nations system. (Weinstein: 2002: 152) Realists counter the neo-liberalist argument by asserting that "what is really needed to show they have a point are historical

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cases of cooperation between states that promoted stability and that would not have occurred without the existence of international institutions." (Stuenkel: 2010) Mozambique, as much as it has been considered a successful intervention, does not demonstrate that the UN installed stability and peace within the region as it has been proven to still be a nation that is gravely unstable. Additionally, one could claim that the United Nations is too big an organization to be effective in the prevention of conflicts in the whole international system. This is where regional institutionalism gains value in their arguments that *"The UN lacks the resources and the commitment of major states to act as a global security provider, creating vacuums that regional powers and institutions sought to fill."* (Weiss: 1998) This is not a revelation. The United Nations has always lacked financial and personnel resources, and in light of it being a security provider for the international community, it comes as no surprise when one asserts its ineffectiveness. In this view, as the international community pushes for democracy and free elections in conflicted, autocratic countries, they 'keep their eyes just on the top' which means that they do not always have an attached comprehensive understanding of politics in the region. (Weinstein: 2002: 156) Thus, a foreign forceful intervention within a state will often guarantee anything but stability and peace within a region. Mozambique was allegedly a successful intervention because the length of the conflict meant support for the war was slowly dying and resources were even scarcer. This opened the path for peace talks and negotiations between the two parties. So does this mean that only when a war runs its course is when people might hope for a peace settlement? If so, how can one judge the length and timeframe for a conflict to end? Is there an alternative for the establishment of peace in the international arena?

Israel and the conflict in the Middle East

The issue regarding the situation in the Middle East is one largely debated amongst the international community at the United Nations. It is one of the most controversial matters the organization has had to deal with so far, being the subject of 76% of all General Assembly country-specific resolutions and 6% UN Security Council resolutions (UNSC) (Kolom: 2009) Most of these resolutions are critical of the Israeli state, notably resolution 1544 of the UNSC that called upon Israel to respect its obligations under international humanitarian law and terminate the demolition of Palestinian houses, which violated that law. Others such as John Mearshimer criticize Israel's offensive nature against the organization of Hamas, as he explores the idea that Israel 'intended to create an open-air prison for the Palestinians in Gaza and inflict great pain on them until they complied with their wishes.' (2009) This also leads to problems in the future, as *"there is also little chance that people around the world who follow the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will soon forget the appalling punishment that Israel is meting out in Gaza. The destruction is just too obvious to miss, and too many people care about the Palestinians' fate."* (Ibid) Mearsheimer was also critical of Israel's war with Lebanon in 2006, as he described Israeli forces as being too assertive of their abilities, which subsequently, counteracted their efforts and created 'major setbacks' in the region as well as devastation for the Lebanese people. (2009: 315) There was a call for the UN to intervene or act, but UN efforts failed in their attempts to control or stabilize the situation. This generated serious criticism of the organization in terms of its abilities to make the world more peaceful. The UN Secretary General at the time addressed the issue stating that 'Just as we have learnt that the world cannot stand aside when gross and systematic violations of human rights are taking place, we have also learnt that, if it is to enjoy the sustained support of the world's peoples, intervention must be based on legitimate and universal principles. We need to adapt our international system better to a world with new actors, new responsibilities, and new possibilities for peace and progress.' (Kofi Annan: 1999) This statement is based upon the idea of respect for state sovereignty, the idea that reformation within the state through the promotion of democracy and its values is a better alternative than intervention. However, in extenuating circumstances, intervention is required as is seen through the principle of *Responsibility to Protect*.

Moreover, the UN has been criticized for disproportionately condemning Israel and also been accused of engaging in armed conflict while Israel has been accused of targeting UN personnel. A report by the United States Institute for Peace affirmed that contrary other states, Israel is denied its rights as a member of the United Nations. 'Every year, UN bodies are required to produce at least 25 reports on alleged human rights violations by Israel, but not one on an Iranian criminal justice system which mandates punishments like crucifixion, stoning, and cross-amputation. This is not legitimate critique of states with equal or worse human rights records. It is demonization of the Jewish state.' (Bayefsky: 2004) The United States' concern about the unbalanced criticism towards Israel being portrayed as the cruel, immoral and discriminant state portrayed in the UN 'have the effect of causing audiences to associate negative

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attributes with Jews in general, thus fueling anti-Semitism.' (Rickman: 2008) This caused a lot of controversy and judgement of the United Nations system, seen to be impartial, ultimately failing in its purpose of being an objective hand to ensure the establishment of world peace. Kofi Annan then stated that *'I know that in the Jewish community at large, it has sometimes seemed as if the United Nations serves all the world's peoples but one: the Jews (...) though it may seem otherwise at times, the United Nations is not just a political body, and there is more on its agenda than Middle East issues. And while your influence will be crucial in supporting the peace process, there is also much more that the United Nations and the Jewish community can do together.'* (1999) Irrevocably, the Middle East has failed in its attempt to build peace within the region, as suspicions of Israel's well established nuclear power and Iran's increasing nuclear threat not including India and Pakistan's instituted nuclear programme. (Fawcett in Williams, 2009: 310)

In light of the above, it is clear that the situation in the Middle East is fragile and unstable. Many scholars such as Mearsheimer and Walt condemn and analyse Israel's faults and mistakes whilst others look at the failures within the United Nations and their inability to remain impartial to the situation. Regardless of the motive for political unrest in the region, the ultimate reflection of failure is in the institutional framework of the United Nations, which was evidently unable, even after many initiatives and plans, to secure a peace agreement between countries that are in conflict. So if institutions such as the United Nations are fundamentally flawed and fail in their purpose, then why do they still exist? Would the international order still be the same if there were no institutionalized forms of global governance? The rhetoric illustrated within charters of international institutions are frequently unequalled in application, but this also varies widely and is impossible to judge. (Fawcett in Williams, 2009: 309)

Conclusion

This paper attempted to bring to light further arguments of the debate on the effectiveness of international institutions and to analyse if they have generally been successful in making the world more peaceful. It was demonstrated with the analysis of the intervention in Mozambique that the United Nations has shown to be successful in the building and maintenance of stability and peace. The ONUMOZ (United Nations Operation in Mozambique) delivered an important message and example of the ways in which a peacekeeping mission should be conducted on behalf of the international community and that if the United Nations had not intervened, then the outcome could have been significantly more disastrous. (Synge: 1997: 3-5) The UN was responsible for much of the transformation that occurred in Mozambique. Their funds, technical expertise, and staff nurtured its shift to democracy and stability, 'demonstrating the payoff that can come from making a sustained commitment in a country moving toward peace.' (Weinstein: 2002: 150) On the other hand the case study of Israel's role in the United Nations and their contribution to the conflict in the Middle East is a clear example of how the United Nations has been unsuccessful in establishing peace in the world. Notable realist scholars criticize Israel's offensive nature against the organization of Hamas, as they explore the idea that Israel 'intends to create an open-air prison for the Palestinians in Gaza and inflict great pain on them until they complied with their wishes.' (Mearsheimer: 2009) Whereas the United Nations is accused of being too critical of the Jewish state with some reports even claiming they are tolerant of anti-Semitic statements. (Bayefsky: 2004) Thus, this proves the argument that 'International Governmental Organizations are used by nations primarily as selective instruments for gaining foreign policy objectives' and spreading their values and beliefs. (McCormick and Kihl: 1979: 502). However, as all the members, according to the UN Charter must have an equal say, it becomes considerably difficult for states to gain full support of the whole organization and thus, the UN cannot be partial so accusing them of such is a grave allegation.

Overall it can be observed that the United Nations is essentially flawed, even though one may argue the case that, without it peace would not have reigned in several countries and regions throughout the world such as in El Salvador, Cambodia, Guatemala and Tajikistan. So, is the United Nations essentially to blame for its overall failure? Other well-renowned international institutions have also had their successes and failures. NATO was applauded for its intervention in Kosovo, whilst criticized for its interference in Bosnia. (Weitz in Keohane, Nye and Hoffman: 1997: 370) The G20 managed to maintain global stability through forging a consensus on a framework for debt restructuring and the need for IMF quota reform. Whereas they have found it difficult to design an agenda that was relevant to all members, politically acceptable, and narrow enough to be tractable to solve the current financial crisis. (Martinez-Diaz and Woods: 2009) Former British diplomat Sir Gladwyn Jebb believes that "the United Nations is a

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mirror of the world around it, if the reflection is ugly, the international organization should not be blamed" (1953: 390) Unquestionably, even with their failures, institutions such as the United Nations still hold great potential and are held in high regard by the international community. There is still hope that one day international institutions will be effective in their aim to make the world more stable and peaceful. Until that day comes, history has proved otherwise and thus, little confidence can be held that in the future international institutions will lead the way to world peace.

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Written by: Sophie Crockett
Written at: Royal Holloway, University of London
Written for: Michael Williams
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