

The UN is an Ineffective Peace-Keeper. Discuss.

Peacekeeping is defined as 'the activity of keeping the peace by military forces (especially when international military forces enforce a truce between hostile groups or nations)' Although the UN charter does not specifically mention peacekeeping as a function it does refer to '...peaceful settlement of disputes.' (Paul Wilkinson, International Relations, a Very Short Introduction). The nature of peacekeeping operations has changed dramatically since the end of the cold war and it could be said that peacekeeping operations have gone through three distinct generations. The traditional view of peacekeeping as the observation of ceasefires through mutual consent from parties to the dispute, these were usually two separate states as after the First Gulf War on the Kuwait-Iraq border. This typically occurred to prevent intervention by the two dominant superpowers, the USA and the USSR during the cold war. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, conflicts within states became more common and the UN began to use peace enforcement, whereby armed UN forces were given a mandate which allowed them to use physical force to pacify an area. This was a way of preventing civil war and the creation of failed states in places like Somalia. Finally the third generation of peacekeeping operations have included peace-building. Peace-building identifies and strengthens internal structures within states which will prevent conflicts from breaking out. The role of the UN in peacekeeping operations has declined dramatically but there has been an increase in the need for both peace-enforcement and peace-building operations. The same factors determine the success or failure of the UN in all these situations.

First, the UN security council determines the action taken by the UN and is responsible for the mandates given to UN forces. In Rwanda, the UN forces in position when the conflict broke out had a mandate of peacekeeping and were therefore unable to act quickly enough to prevent full scale genocide from taking place, during which 800,000 Tutsi were massacred. This is a result of a reluctance of the UN security council to act, possibly due to an apathy towards Africa or a kind of global bystander effect. The security council also failed to change the mandate to peace-enforcement and instead withdrew the troops they did have stationed there based on the logic that there was no peace left to keep. The number of troops stationed in Rwanda reduced from 2,500 to 270 after an attack by Hutu rebels on a group of Belgian troops which killed ten UN representatives. This gave the impression that the UN was not prepared to protect the Tutsi population of Rwanda and that the Hutus could continue their genocide with impunity. Similarly in Sierra Leone conflict had arisen since 1991 as the RUF waged war on the corrupt government in place and yet the UN did not intervene until 2000. During this time of inaction approximately 50,000 people died.

Next, the UN must possess sufficient resources and have the ability to have them transported to where they are required in order to be successful in peacekeeping operations. In Rwanda, alongside a mandate which left UN troops unable to defend civilians there was also a shortage of resources both human and in areas such as armaments. The same problem was prominent in Bosnia during the civil war in Bosnia 1991-1997. The UN in 1995 began to set up 'safe havens' for refugees, such as that of Srebrenica. Although the UN mandate allowed NATO troops to enforce the peace and therefore to protect the proposed 'safe havens' the UN remained unable to defend them due to a lack of troops and the presence of the 'safe havens' made the Bosnian Muslims easily identifiable by the Serbian enemy. In Srebrenica, approximately 8,000 Bosnian males were brutally murdered. Also, the UN aid convoys possessed enough food aid to offer support to the poorest regions of Bosnia, however the UN frequently prevented the transportation of the aid to the regions where conflict was at its fiercest in an effort to prevent diplomatic efforts to reach a settlement from being undermined. As a result of this the aid convoys were far less effective than they had the potential to be, with the regions of Bosnia which could have benefited from them the most, having little to no access to aid.

Furthermore, it must be remembered that the UN is not an autonomous organisation. It is an intergovernmental organisation (IGO) which consists only of the member states and possesses no military of its own. Therefore in order for the UN to be successful, even if the security council is in favour of action, there must be support from other nations and the willingness to contribute militarily or financially to the cause. The force sent to monitor the ceasefire within the demilitarized zone on the border between Iraq and Kuwait in 1991 consisted of troops from many powerful and influential member states such as China, India, the Soviet Union and the USA. This aided in its relative success; the eventual withdrawal of UN troops in 2003 whilst maintaining a lasting peace in this area. Similarly, in East Timor, the UN was supported by Australia, working to prevent an influx of Indonesian immigrants which led to a peace agreement being reached and East Timor gaining recognition as an independent state. However, the UN was unable to control its economy and made East Timor the poorest Asian state. Conversely UN failure in Somalia could be in part caused by a lack of support from neighbouring African states who, like the Somalian population, viewed the UN as a medium of invasion by the USA and who begrudged the intervention of Western states in what they viewed to be solely African issues.

Another factor which contributes to the success of the UN in peacekeeping operations is that there must be agreement between parties to the dispute, in particular the Government of the state. In Cambodia, the willingness of the de facto provisional government, The State of Cambodia to relinquish control to the UN meant that the UN was able to exercise military restraint and advocate democratic elections to determine a new Government in Cambodia. Cambodia is seen as a relative success, as the state did not deteriorate into civil war and human rights in the area were dramatically improved. However, the UN mission is criticised as having boosted immorality within Cambodia as the rate of prostitution and increased significantly. From 6,000 to 20,000. As a result of this, Cambodia is now heavily effected by AIDS. Another example of where the UN peacekeeping was relatively successful as parties to the dispute were in accord is Bosnia. The Dayton proximity talks were a success as The Bosnian Government and Croatians reached a compromise and forced the Serbians to acquiesce.

Finally, the UN's success may be determined by factors entirely outside of it's control, such as the nature of the conflict it faces. A trend seems to be that the UN is better suited for peacekeeping in external conflicts than internal ones. The First Gulf War 1990-1991 demonstrated that the UN could support a campaign to prevent invasion of Kuwait by Iraq- although the forces sent were mainly American and the UN was supported by the majority of the member states. This may be because the matter is quite clear cut. The UN knows who it should support and who it is that it is opposes. Internal conflicts such as that of the Congo seem generally to be less successful. In the Congo, several different violent groups claimed to have the right to govern the new independent state after Belgium granted independence in 1960 and the UN mandate was peacekeeping, therefore it's 10,000 armed troops were merely able to use violence in self defence. The UN's principle of impartiality was compromised by it's refusal to use military power to prevent the Tshombe Government in Katanga who declared independence of this region. This led to Lumumba seeking assistance from the USSR and allowed the conflict to escalate when the USSR agreed to provide assistance in the form of weaponry. Another reason why the nature of the conflict could have an adverse affect on the effectiveness of the UN as a peace-keeper is that the nature of some conflicts can be deep and enduring despite actions to prevent them, examples being ethnic cleansing and religious conflict. Rwanda epitomises the idea that such conflicts are so prominent in the culture and history of an area -and in the case of Rwanda have been exploited by colonial masters- that it is unlikely that UN intervention will ever bring about a lasting peace.

In conclusion in the area of peacekeeping the UN has a record of abject failures -the worst of which being the genocide in Rwanda and failure to change the status of Somalia as a failed state- punctuated with a few marginal successes such as running East Timor as a protectorate

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and the successful monitoring of the ceasefire on the Iraq-Kuwait border. Also UN intervention is most successful when conflicts are between two states and there is a clear distinction between the party which the UN should support and that which it should oppose.