

The Failure of the Global Gendarmerie: A Theoretical Perspective

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Since the events of 9/11, the international arena has been flooded with war, rebellion, coups d'état and constant political unrest. On the other side of the barricade stands the United Nations, the global institution with a strong focus on security and the prevention of the loss of human life. With its roots in the former League of Nations, the United Nations is considered today the world's peacekeeper and conflict mediator. This essay will provide an outline of the United Nations as an institution, its procedures and scope, while taking into account the recent events worldwide.

Through reference to two major schools of thought in international theory, realism and liberalism, this paper will evaluate the effectiveness of the institution and show that, although this institution was (and still is) paramount to worldwide stability, it is far from flawless and requires immediate reform in order to maintain global order and security.

First of all, the elements that provide an argument for the inefficiency of the United Nations will be brought forth. The emphasis will be put on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), as it can be considered the most important organ of the organisation[1]. The main scope of the UNSC is the mediation of conflict and the provision of global security. Bjørn Møller elaborates on this concept of security by delimiting it into four distinct types: national security (dealing with the state), societal security (nations and societal groups), human security (individuals and mankind in general) and environmental security (species and eco-systems) (Møller, 2005). This paper, for the sake of conciseness and clarity, will follow Møller's categorisations of the concept of security, with emphasis on the national aspect.

National security, a term very well-known but rarely understood, is preoccupied by the maintaining of a state's sovereignty and territorial integrity against military attacks from other states. Article 24 of the U.N. Charter provides that the Security Council member states assume responsibility for "the maintenance of international peace and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf" (U.N. Charter, Chapter V, art. 23). One can see the importance of such an organization, an institution meant to preserve peace worldwide with the help of its member states, many of which are today's superpowers. That would guarantee the balance of world politics and a framework where conflicts can be resolved through peaceful means. Realism would define the world today differently, especially due to the fact that it considers states to be the legally sovereign actors (Smith, Owens & Baylis, 2011, p. 4). Realism (and more recently, neo-realism) denies the relevance of an international institution that is to decide and regulate the behaviour of states. and sees inter-state relationship as a struggle for power, where each state's aim is to take advantage of the other and to prevent any one of them from achieving overall hegemony. For neo-realists, such as Mearsheimer, the international arena is not characterised by constant war, but with a strong competition between states, where war (seen as the ultimate weapon that will decide one's state domination over the other) is extremely probable. The difficulty of inter-state cooperation can be seen to be caused by two main probable factors: the prospect of cheating and relative gains (Smith, Owens & Baylis, 2011, p. 235). The prospect of cheating presupposes that states are fearful that others will cheat on their agreements and attempt to gain an advantage over them. Due to military technology evolving so fast, a *Blitzkrieg* could prove fatal for the attacked state and could destabilise the balance of power. As Mearsheimer mentioned: "such a development could create a window of opportunity for the cheating side to inflict a decisive defeat on the victim side". The other difficulty is a concept called relative gains. States, realists argue, instead of being interested in maximising their

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benefits while in a partnership, are more interested in gaining more than the state they are cooperating with. Combined with the principle that states are self-interested and always trying to maximise their gains, it can be inferred that cooperation would be extremely difficult in an international environment characterised by mistrust, uncertainty and dangerous competitiveness.

Applying these principles to today's reality, consider the U.S. decision to invade Iraq; the UNSC was against it. The reasons why the Bush administration decided to go against the decision of such an important organisation will not be considered in detail; suffice to say that the U.N. could have been seen as incapable to influence a Member State and also incapable of sanctioning a state for going against the organisation. The United Nations Security Council had its power structure, as Jaoao Augusto de Araujo Castro, former president of the Council would say, frozen. (Augusto de Araujo Castro, 1972). Why? Because at that time, the United States was the strongest superpower in the world; going against it would have been counter-productive. Although writers such as Madeleine K. Albright would argue that art. 51 of the Charter provides states with the right to self-defense (Albright, 2003) until the UNSC has taken measures, it should be noted that pre-emptive invasion is not self-defence. A more recent example is the exercise of *veto* from China and Russia regarding Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria. The Council found itself unable to act yet again, regardless of the fact that over 15,000 people have already died in the civil war (as of May 2012, source: BBC).

Considering the above, the incapacity of the UNSC can be seen: although its aims are high and extremely noble, the UNSC presented itself in these situations like any other organisation, prone to control by superpowers and unable to act. The Minister of Foreign Affairs for the Republic of Cuba, in a 2011 speech in the General Assembly of the United Nations, publicly condemned the US and NATO for their intervention in Libyan affairs and stated: "While we are deliberating here in this hall, 'another preventive' war is taking place in Libya using as a pretext 'the protection of civilians' (66th General Debate of the General Assembly of the United Nations, N.Y. 26th September 2011). Through this statement, His Excellency Mr Rodriguez Parrilla blamed the UN for inaction.

Another impediment to the action and effectiveness of the UNSC in providing security of human rights and international security is the inviolability of a state's territorial integrity and sovereignty. This is yet another aspect of international relations that will prove difficult to overcome for the UN in order to maintain global balance and security. There is a fine line between the need to protect human lives and the non-intervention into domestic political matters of states.

In continuation, this essay will assess the organisations and procedures that make the United Nations a paramount institution in today's international arena. Emphasis will be made on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) initiative and the large number of organisations within the UN, with reference to liberal theories and the historical background of the organisation.

R2P is an approach that could help save human lives and provide a framework in which Member States could intervene in others without violating their sovereignty – through peaceful protesting, political and economic marginalisation of the state in question and even complete isolation. The UNSC could prove that, through this initiative, the realist theory of latent war in international relations may become less relevant and conflicts will become easier to resolve through peaceful means.

Beyond the Council itself, the UN's relevance is evident in the work of a multitude of organisations that are working toward the eradication of problems such as HIV/AIDS and SARS. Madeleine Albright presented a very powerful point in 2003:

In 2003 alone, the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iran had processed nuclear materials in violation of its Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty obligations; the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia tried deposed Yugoslav leader Slobodan Milosevic for genocide; and the World Health Organisation successfully coordinated the global response to severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). Meanwhile, the World Food Programme has fed more than 70 million people annually for the last five years; the U.N. high Commissioner for Refugees maintains a lifeline to the international homeless; the U.N. Children's Fund has launched a campaign to

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end forced childhood marriage; the Joint U.N. Programme on HIV/AIDS remains a focal point for global efforts to defeat HIV/AIDS; and the U.N. Population Fund helps families plan, mothers survive and children grow up healthy in the most impoverished places on Earth.

A strong point can thus be made for the extreme relevance of the institution in the world today. One must also not forget the very important role the UN played in the Cold War, in mediating the very dangerous conflict between the West and the former Soviet Union. Although not flawless, UN peacekeeping efforts have maintained order in places like Namibia, El Salvador, Cambodia, eastern Slavonia, Mozambique and Cyprus. These are only a small selection of successful instances of UN peacekeeping.

To conclude, the United Nations is a paramount organisation for the protection of human rights, maintaining political balance as much as possible in a world 'bloodied' by conflict, which only recently experienced the 'Arab Spring', and which has been experiencing an ever-increasing problem of famine and disease. And one must not forget one of the most important documents created by this institution: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which can be considered today the epitome of respect for human life and protection of human and civil liberties.

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[1] For the sake of convenience, throughout the essay the terms 'organisation' and 'institution' are used interchangeably.

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