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United Nations and Peacekeeping Assessment of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

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Abstract

The research is about the roles of the United Nations and how it has helped so far, to resolve the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The United Nations (UN) was established in 1945, after the failure of the League of Nations. As an inter-governmental organization, the UN serves as a framework for cooperative problem-solving among states. According to the UN charter, its first and foremost role is the maintenance of international peace and security. The main objectives of the study therefore, include; to investigate the roles of the UN in the Russia-Ukraine conflict and to carry out a concrete analysis of the peacekeeping efforts made by the UN in the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The study adopts a qualitative method, data will be gotten from secondary sources such as past and recent works of scholars and researchers, articles, journals and other credible sources. For further analysis, Key-informant interview would be carried out whereby six individuals who are knowledgeable about the topic would be interviewed; the responses were connected to the research questions. However, this is a theoretical essay that discusses the strengths and shortcomings of the theories of Realism, Liberalism and Constructivism in regard to the thesis. The UN has been criticized for its failure in maintaining international peace and security especially in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The findings of the study established that the United Nations have had its share of successes and failures, if stringent steps are taken now, the Russia-Ukraine conflict could be halted.

Keywords: United Nations, Peacekeeping, Conflict, Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism

Introduction

Since 1945, the principal goal of the United Nations has been to preserve global peace and stability. However, throughout the past seven decades, there have been numerous violent conflicts that have affected billions of people in different regions of the world. Mehta (2008) claims that there are more than 50 active wars around the globe and that at least 17 peacekeeping missions are being carried out by more than 100,000 troops from 119 different nations. Following the 1948 armistice conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors, the UN launched its first peacekeeping mission with the deployment of an unarmed military observation force. The UN's initial attempt into peacekeeping was UN Emergency Force (UNEF) I, which was established in 1956 to remove the armed forces of France, the United Kingdom, and Israel from Egyptian land. Due to the increase in intra-state disputes towards the conclusion of the Cold War, the UN expanded its operations from conventional to complex multidimensional missions. The number of peacekeepers increased dramatically from 11,000 to 75,000 after the conclusion of the cold war.

The biggest threat to peace and security in Europe since the conclusion of the Cold War is Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in February 2022. The invasion was regarded as a violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty, as well as a violation of the provisions of the UN Charter. Since member nations have ratified the UN's guiding principles, they must all be followed; they cannot be applied selectively. With 93 countries voting in favor and 24 voting against, the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution calling for Russia to be suspended from the Human Rights Council. The resolution received a two-thirds majority of votes cast, excluding abstentions, in the 193-member General Assembly (The UN, 2022).

The practice of peacekeeping has been developed by the United Nations Organization for decades, and it has shown to be more or less successful in aiding in the peaceful conclusion of hostilities. However, following the conclusion of the Cold War, in the turbulent 1990s, the UN forces in Eastern Europe and Africa, particularly in Angola, Somalia, Croatia, Bosnia, Rwanda, and Herzegovina, suffered some of their worst failures.. Just ten years after these events, the UN's peacekeeping strategy began to be revised in order to adapt to the new international environment. As a result, a more "rugged" personality is implied, suggesting a propensity to use specific peace enforcement techniques and allowing the blue helmets to use force while acting on behalf of the UN.

The United Nations is a global organization founded in 1945, and its organ that is primarily responsible for upholding global peace and security is the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In contrast to settling disputes or establishing peace in troubled places, the UN is more concerned with preventing war (Hilmarsdorttir, 2012). As a result, the UN participated in a few peacekeeping operations after the Second World War where the participating countries controlled their militaries rather than the UN administration. Dobbins (2007) argued that this was a dangerous strategy for maintaining peace since the contributing nations might take a partisan interest in the operations. The League of Nations, which is no longer in existence and failed to stop a second global war, was prone to the same problems that the UN faces.

The UN's function encompasses the entire world, according to its charter, it is most known for its work in humanitarian aid, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and creating peace. The UN, its specialized agencies, funding, and programs have an impact on people and improve the world in a variety of ways. Due to its distinctive international nature and the authority granted by its founding Charter, the organization is able to act on a variety of issues and give its 193 Member States a forum to express their opinions through the General Assembly, the Security Council, and other bodies and committees (UN, 1945). The UN's four main objectives are to uphold world peace, foster goodwill among nations, assist them in cooperating to improve the lives of the poor, eradicate poverty, disease, and illiteracy, and promote respect for one another's rights and freedoms, as well as serve as a focal point for coordinating national efforts to accomplish these objectives (UN, 1945).

Theoretical Framework

Realism

It is a classic international theory contains in a conception of international relations, which is based on the theory of the "State of Nature". It is a theory primarily rooted in Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. The most frequently adopted theory of international relations and the oldest theory is Realism which is also referred to as power politics or realpolitik (Donnelly, 2005). Classical realism predicts war and conflict as the consequences as states are trapped in cycle of fear and the thirst of world domination. The theorists are concerned with the power itself and not with the explanation of the causes of power. Therefore, peace arises from the balance of power between the superpowers. The realists' thinkers anchored their argument on the notion of anarchy, they view the world as it really is and not as it should be. Realism offers a theoretical lens to examine and compare peacekeeping with other types of state behavior in the peace and security domain (Cunliffe, 2013). States compete for power through and over peacekeeping. In the Tragedy of Great Power Politics, John Mearsheimer contends that unbalanced multi polarity with a potential hegemony attempting to use force to alter the status quo in its favor characterizes regions that are most prone to war, and that the rise of China poses the greatest threat to international peace (Mearsheimer, 2001). Realists concur with the majority of accepted definitions that state that "peace" is the "absence of war and other overt acts of violence" (Anderson, 2004). But for a realist, "calm" does not necessarily equate to "powerless".

Comparing the idealists' desire for the adoption of international law and the establishment of an international government, realists believe that the game of balance of power is the most feasible means of establishing peace and stability (Hitti, 1985). Whereas, the two basic foundations of military capabilities and military alliances are necessary to ensure national security (Dunne, Kurki, and Smith, 2016). Since there is no global authority in pl ace that has jurisdiction over all states, realism typically presupposes that international politics is anarchic and that all states are subject to the same rules. The desire for governments to be powerful arises from the effort made by humans to acquire power, this desire is constant and pursued for either purposes or as a means. Naturally, this implies that, in realist vision, state behavior is just an extension of human behavior (Faraj, 2007). Realists contend that states will inevitably go to war despite the efforts of international organizations, which have no real influence, even though they do not entirely reject the United Nations. Realists typically contend that when powerful states' interests are served, international organizations appear to be successful. However, of the situation changes and a group starts to work against national interests, the situation can be different. Realists frequently use this line of thinking to explain why the League of Nations failed because it did not take into account Germany and Japan's expansionist aspirations in the 1930s, an example from now would be the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, which was not approved by the Security Council. Despite resistance, the United States simply disregarded the UN and moved forward.

The realistic approaches link power politics to peacekeeping. The explanation for the phenomenon of peacekeeping centers on the allocation of power and consideration of interests among the major players in the system, particularly superpowers of the times, which pushed their will on other governments and forced them to submit to them, are primarily responsible for the origin of UN peacekeeping. Powerful states prioritize their relative gains which are crucial in anarchic environments and also necessary for survival, when maintaining peace. According to the realist

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interpretation, peacekeeping began as a way for strong governments to have a framework that would limit the actions of other states and allow them to intervene in crises throughout the world as needed. As a result, it became a tool in the hands of strong governments that they could use to influence the system in order to suit their needs.

Liberalism

Different ideas and arguments regarding how institutions, behaviors and economic linkages restrain and lessen the violent power of states can be found in liberalism. In comparison to realism, it expands our field of vision by include more elements, particularly the consideration of citizens and international organizations. In particular liberalism has historically been seen as the opponent of realism in international relations theory because it promotes a more upbeat worldview that is based on a different historical interpretation than that of realist studies. Building institutions that safeguard individual freedom by restricting and regulating political power is liberalism's primary goal. Individualism, human rights, universality, freedom from government interference, the right to be treated equally under the law, the obligation to respect and treat others as "ethical subjects," as well as the freedom to engage in social activity, are among the key ideas of liberalism (Fukuyama, 1992; Doyle, 1983). The idea of representative government, the value of private property ownership, and the right to unrestricted economic activity are all tightly linked to these individual liberties (Fukuyama, 1992; Doyle, 1983). Another claim made by Liberalism is that a hegemon who actively engages in international politics can establish stability and a modicum of peace within the international system (Doyle, 1983; Nye, 1990). The hegemonic stability hypothesis contends that economic stability, which is viewed as a collective or public good in the international system and benefits all the states, may be produced by a hegemon in the system of states by having more economic and military might than other states.

Constructivism

International organizations are supported by constructivist arguments. They contend that international institutions play a crucial role in shaping states' identities and interests, which in turn influence how they behave and how they act (Mitchell, 2006). According to Finnemore (Hobson, 2003), states are "normative-adaptive entities." This means that in order to educate their policies and internal structures, nations adapt worldwide standards of proper state behavior through international organizations. International standards therefore encourage state cooperation even when achieving states' power as well as utility-maximizing aims is not possible. Contrary to neo-realists, constructivists downplay the importance of relative benefit and promote the likelihood of state cooperation (Nugroho, 2008). Additionally, international organizations such as the UN exert power over states by limiting their ability to act in their own self-interest and imposing new, acceptable norms on them. Constructivists accept neo-liberals as a result of their optimistic perspective on the function of the international organizations. Above all, international organizations responsibilities include encouraging member states to embrace nonviolent conflict resolution techniques and advancing the democratization of member states (Mitchell, 2006).

Constructivists concur with realists that there is an anarchic structure to international relations, but they do not believe that this structure in and of itself predisposes states to a particular course of action. This is so because no structure can exist in a vacuum from the creative process that led to its creation and from the overall meaning that its constituent actors will give it. Wendt claims that states develop identities through their involvement in this group process, which results in "relatively stable, role-specific, understandings and expectations about self." Others in this camp believe that internal factors and domestic actors within a particular state are more important in shaping identities than interstate interactions, still others believe that norms and how states interact with them are the key determinants of identity formation.

UN Peacekeeping Efforts in the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

The conflict in Ukraine has brought the UN's role into sharp relief and prompted a number of inquiries about what the body is doing, to respond to the Security Council's decisions, whether it can isolate Russia, or if there are options for peacekeeping. To lessen the suffering caused by Russia's unwarranted invasion of Ukraine, numerous UN agencies are mobilizing. But the UN Security Council is at a standstill because Russia, one of the five permanent members, has veto power. In addition to vetoing a UN Security Council resolution denouncing its invasion, experts argue that Russia also used the body to disseminate propaganda, including widely debunked claims about American-funded biological laboratories in Ukraine (Wesolowsky, 2022). The actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who was denounced as a "war criminal" by U.S. President Joe Biden on March 16, 2022, as well as the Security Council's response thus far, have sparked calls for reform. One European defense minister even suggested disbanding the UN amid doubts about the ability of the international organization to uphold peace and security throughout the world. In addition, given the conflict in the Security Council, some observers of the UN are forecasting years of paralysis similar to those experienced during the worst of the Cold War. According to Richard Gowan, UN director at the International Crisis Group, the current crisis is the most concerning manifestation of a longer-term trend at the Security Council that primarily pits Russia and its allies China against the West.

The international law of interstate warfare underwent a significant transformation after 1945. Traditional international law viewed declaring war as a sovereign prerogative of governments, in order to shield future generations from the "scourge of war," as stated in the Preamble to the UN Charter, the United Nations aimed to tightly restrict bloodshed between states. Article 2, paragraph 4, of the United Nations Charter (1945), which states that all members of the organization shall abstain from using or threatening to use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the Organization, reflects the ambition. By this clause, the UN established a broad ban on the use of force, which has since evolved into a new fundamental principle of the global legal system. Notwithstanding the fact that the Russian state calls it a "special military operation," it is crucial to emphasize that the Russian Federation's military action is a blatant instance of an interstate use of force (Amnesty International, 2022). Only contracted soldiers may be used in combat, and Russia has not ordered a mass conscription of the populace, therefore this wording has no bearing on international law but it is meant to indicate that the military involvement does not constitute war under Russian constitutional law (Gorobets, 2022). The Alliance for Peace resolution supported the UN Secretary-General's call for an end to Russia's invasion of

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Ukraine and denounced Russia's special military operation, invalidating it on February 25, 2022. The Security Council asked the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to monitor Russia's compliance with "the procedures recommended by the IAEA board" in addition to the agency's current inspections in Russia, cease and immediately, unconditionally and completely remove all of its soldiers from Ukraine's territory within its internationally recognized borders. The proposal also cited Russia's decision of February 21, 2022, on the circumstances in certain regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, Ukraine, as a violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty as well as the violation of the UN's Charter guiding principle.

In the aspect of peacekeeping in Ukraine, Jane Cernochova, the defense minister of Czech Republic, has urged the UN to send in peacekeepers, claiming that failing to do so would call into doubt the UN's usefulness. "It is hopeless when a situation of this magnitude occurs and the UN is unable to take decisive action. They should figure out a method to send in blue helmets, or soldiers who would keep an eye on supplies and respect for human rights. It's time to change the UN if it can't accomplish that," on March 13, Cernochova told Czech public television. Nevertheless, Farhan Aziz Haq, the deputy spokesperson for the UN Secretary-General, stated in written comments, that such a force would require the consent of the Security Council. When the Ukrainian conflict entered the ninth year, ambiguity surrounded the council's decision to hold the year's first meeting on Ukraine under the agenda item "Threats to international peace and security." This was because the issue was put to procedural vote. 15 of the 46 meetings on Ukraine were held in accordance with this agenda item, 18 were held under "Maintenance of international Peace and Security," and 11 were held in response to requests made in letters from the Permanent Representatives of either the Russian Federation or Ukraine to the President of the Security Council (UN Press, 2023). On March 17, under the Agenda item "Threats to international peace and security," Under Secretary-General DiCarlo brought attention to the protection that civilians are entitled to under international humanitarian law. She informed the Council that, between 24 February and 15 March, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) recorded 1900 civilian casualties, the majority of which were brought on by the use of weapons with a large area of effect in populated areas. She also detailed the desperate circumstances under which individuals in Mariupol were living, where they were unable to leave safely due to a lack of food, water, electricity, and medical treatment. The number of individuals fleeing Ukraine into neighboring countries has increased from 520,000 to over 3.1 million in less than three weeks, according to Raouf Mazou, Assistant High Commissioner for Operations at the UNCHR. This is the fastest growing refugee crisis in Europe since the Second World War (UN Press, 2023).

According to the representative of the Russian Federation, Moscow would not have needed to carry out targeted attacks on infrastructure to reduce Kyiv's military capabilities if the West had urged Ukraine to make peace on reasonable terms rather than arming it, initial research indicated that the incident on November 15 was not a planned attack, according to Poland's representative. Yet he emphasized that it was the Russian Federation's fault for endangering the globe with its aggressive war and its aftereffects. At the request of the Russian Federation, the Council convened on December 9 under the item "Threats to international peace and security" to discuss the potential effects of the continuous flow of arms into Ukraine on peace negotiations. According to the official of that nation, military operations in Ukraine would have ceased long ago if not for assistance from the West. The representative for Ukraine thanked those who had helped his nation and stated that the liberation of the Kharkiv, Kherson and Luhansk areas proved that all of the country's armaments were being used for their intended purposes. When briefing the Council as well, High Representative Nakamitsu urged all Member States to implement practical arms control measures, she emphasized, however, that ending the war was the only way to put a stop to the misery and destruction in Ukraine (UN Press, 2023).

UN Peacekeeping Efforts in Eastern Europe

The UN interfered in a number of Eastern European nations, either helping to limit the conflict or failing to bring it to a conclusion. Such countries include Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina e.t.c

Kosovo

The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia only comprised Serbia and Montenegro at the beginning of 1998. This occurred after the former Yugoslav republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia and Slovenia left the union and attained independence during the preceding ten years. Serbia's southwest included the province of Kosovo. According to Beesley, Kosovo is primarily made up of ethnic Albanians and was based on administrative boundaries created during the Yugoslav era. Kosovo is situated in the heart of southeast Europe's Balkan area. Serbia attempted to defend the Serbian minority in Kosovo using military force, just as it did in Bosnia and Croatia, according to Beesley. The Associated Press reports that Serbia also considered Kosovo to be a part of Serbia because of long-standing relations between the two countries. It's been centuries since a quarrel arose over Kosovo. As the spiritual and national center of Serbia, the area is highly valued. According to the Associated Press (AP), Kosovo is home to a large number of Serb Orthodox Christian monasteries. The Kosovo Liberation Army and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia were at war during the Kosovo War (Serbia and Montenegro). Also, NATO bombed Yugoslavian forces during the conflict. According to PBS, the NATO war in Kosovo and Serbia at the beginning of 1999 came before the Yugoslavian forces withdrew from Kosovo in June (Davis, 2023).

According to the Associated Press, more than 10,000 people lost their lives and around 1 million people were homeless. The United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK) was established in June, 1999. Amnesty International claimed in a study in 2013 that the UNMIK utterly failed to look into the kidnapping and killing of Kosovo Serbs in the wake of the 1998-1999 conflict. Protecting the human rights of Albanian Kosovars, establishing a stable political system and attempting to reach an agreement with Serbia about Kosovo's independence were the tasks assigned to UNMIK. First of all, it would be stretching the truth to say that UNMIK is a total failure. It was successful in calming down a tense situation with particular effectiveness in the judicial and security departments. UNMIK failed to accomplish their primary goal, which was to reach a settlement with Serbia. Most scholars concur that the UN also failed to establish a stable political order with functional institutions to support an effective government. The fundamental cause of this failure appeared to be that UNMIK made decisions without consulting the local community. Support for UNMIK gradually waned over time as a result of their

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marginalization. As a result, UNMIK rapidly lost confidence, which ultimately resulted in its dissolution in 2007.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

In 1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia) had a population of 4 million people, made up of Yugoslavs and three major ethnic groups: Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims, 44 percent), Serbs (31 percent), Croats (17 percent) and Yugoslav (8 percent). Bosnia's government proclaimed its independence from Yugoslavia on April 5, 1992. The Bosnian Serbs undertook a military campaign to prevent the establishment of an independent Bosnia with a majority of Bosniaks (Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1992-1995). In what is now known as "ethnic cleansing," the Serbs attacked Bosniak and Croatian residents in regions under their authority. An estimated 100,000 people were killed during the subsequent civil war, which lasted from 1992 to 1995, with Bosniaks accounting for 80% of the fatalities. Up to 8,000 Bosniak men and boys from the town of Srebrenica were massacred by Bosnian Serb forces in July 1995. After the Holocaust, it was the biggest massacre in Europe. The Bosnian government pleaded with the UN to intervene as soon as the conflict in the country began in 1992, but the organization declined and Serbs began beheading boys and men as they went from town to town, several hundred women were raped and sent to detention camps.

Several UN resolutions denouncing the assault by the Serb forces were passed, but the most influential members of the UN did nothing (Najeeb, 2022). When General Philippe Morillon, the UN peacekeeping commander in Bosnia, delivered long-needed medical help, food and protection on March 12, 1993, it gave Bosnians new hope. General Morillon understood right away that it would be more challenging to leave Srebrenica the same night as they had intended due to large number of refugees. He declared that the people of Bosnia were now "under the protection of UN forces" in order to settle the situation. Due to the fact that this statement was made without receiving any official orders or clearance, it comforted the Bosnians while causing concern at the UN headquarters (Najeeb, 2022). The United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) was a peacekeeping mission formed in Bosnia. Humanitarian aid was successfully distributed by the peacekeepers, but they utterly failed to put an end to the fighting and bring the warring groups back together in harmony. It was not just a disaster for the UN peacekeeping effort but also a terrible loss for humanity (Najeeb, 2022).

Conclusion

The roles of the United Nations as a global organization have been duly analyzed through empirical review of this study. The UN succeeded in some and been a dismal failure in the others. The UN Security Council is deadlocked by five permanent members with veto powers, before a decision can be made, these members have to agree and if one of them place a veto then a decision cannot be made. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict longevity is as a result of the power play by the United States and its allies and other actors. According to some of the respondents interviewed, the UN peacekeeping has not been possible because of the aggressor in the conflict which is Russia, which is also one of the permanent members at the UNSC.

However, the UN has been criticized for its inability to stop the Russia-Ukraine conflict, although it has been successful in managing humanitarian crisis. The UN has been ineffective most of the time because of its incapacitation. Less intervention from other actors is advised, that is only way the conflict can come to an utmost end.

Recommendations

The findings recommend the reform of the UN Security Council, the members of the UN are not equally represented at the UNSC, 5 out of 193 members are given the opportunity to make decisions whether for or against the remaining members. These five members take decisions based on their personal interests. If there is a reform of the UNSC, the UN will become effective, accountable and transparent, decision should not be imposed but collectively taken. However, for the conflict to end, a regime change in Russia is needed. Also, there should be less intervention in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict by actors and non-actors like the United States, United Kingdom, China, European Union etc. Both sides must agree to stop fighting, then the UN must create a forum that is conducive for negotiation.

Suggestions for further studies

According to this study, whose main goal was to look into how the UN plays a part in maintaining peace in Eastern Europe, I conducted research by critically analyzing how the conflict between Russia and Ukraine has lasted and the proper steps to stop the conflict. Additionally, this study employed a descriptive design and an eclectic methodology, which explains how it combined political and international relations theories and relied on key informant interviews, secondary research instruments and a sample size that was relatively small using the non-probability sampling method.

Therefore, in order to make more accurate generalizations, I advise that future research explore employing a larger sample size, perform research in the affected regions to actualize and gather necessary data. Also, the conflict is still ongoing, there is no certainty it would end soon.

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