THE SOVEREIGN STATE IN LIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL OBLIGATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS AND THE UN’S EVOLVING ROLE

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**The Sovereign State in Light of International Obligations and Expectations and the UN’s evolving role**   
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Sovereignty is for any modern state a fundamental right, safeguarding it from the malicious designs and intentions of other states, and deeply intertwined with the sense of nationalism and unity of its people.  The erosion of a state’s sovereignty is analogous to the legal and political breakdown of a state in the international system.  It is therefore intriguing that states in the last two decades have been readjusting to a new world order dominated by a single power, which has been instrumental along with its allies in challenging previously recognized notions of sovereignty in world politics.  It is common to hear in contemporary diplomatic parlance about the international community and its demands that are usually expressed through the United Nations (UN).  The implication is that the will of the international community overrides the rights of individual states that defy it.  The evolving role of the United Nations in the modern era provides an insight to the changing world system and its demands on individual states that superficially at least reveals a systematic assault on the notion of sovereignty.

In recent years arguments emerged that the UN should not uphold the interests of states altogether and instead focus on the direct interests of people, thus the human development emphasis.  Traditional notions of sovereignty and its inviolability thus become hurdles towards achieving a better world where the rights of people supersede the rights of states.  This marked a contradiction in the 21st Century due to the inability to match the state’s visceral desire to protect its interests with finding new ways to resolve modern day military, security and socio-economic dilemmas that threaten many of these states.  Evidently, the UN has adopted specialized international tasks that walk a tightrope between these competing factors.

**The rise of the nation-state**

States are actors in an international system where there is an absence of a central authority or legal hierarchy, forcing each state to become responsible for the social organization and protection of the national community that revolves around it.  As there is an unequal distribution of resources, size and populations among these states this places some nation-states at a strategic disadvantage to others.  These factors make the existence of many nation-states extremely fragile and open to aggression by stronger and ambitious nation-states.  National communities thus emerged in an anarchic world system, where there is an ‘absence or failure of government.’[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn1" \o ")  The only limit to a powerful state was the power of another state or a combination of states.  This situation undermined social development and trade, essential for the survival of communities, as war becomes the state’s central concern.

The Treaty of Westphalia in the seventeenth century helped formulate the modern notion of statehood and sovereignty and set the framework for the modern international system.  It was an early effort to create relations in a multi-state system based on the legal rights of individual states, after a thirty-year war that devastated much of northern and central Europe, which provided a degree of protection to weaker or smaller states from their neighbours.  For some historians the rise of modern Europe as a powerful industrial, military and intellectual force was linked to the establishment of the Westphalian system after 1648 that afforded a degree of stability to its members.

The Westphalian system created an understanding that states defined by territorial units would be subject to no superior authority.  While at the time the intention was to limit religious, namely Catholic, interference in the domain of local monarchs, the notion of sovereignty later emerged that came to mean that interference of any form in the affairs of a state, whether a monarchy and later a republic, is deemed unacceptable provocation to war.  There were other important legal concepts in international relations that were to emerge such as the tendency towards the creation of contiguous states so that land became the basis of political jurisdiction as much as people.  Equally important was the equal status of sovereign states in the international system regardless of geography, population size, the age of the state, or its type of government.

States in Europe became fixed units with territorial bounds, thus references to occupied territories began to take on meaning as previously land was an acceptable prize of conquest in war and was often traded as part diplomatic bartering.  Sovereign nation-states such as Great Britain, France and after 1870 Germany became large industrial and military powers with the ability to cause devastation as never before.  Europe’s great nation-states formed alliances creating a balance of power system to keep peace on the continent.  The uneasy peace however was characterized by a massive arms race and intense national rivalry.  Thus Europe gave rise to jingoism and extreme forms of nationalism with a militaristic streak that became emulated in all the regions of the world, often with a devastating effect.[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn2" \o ")

As both the nation-state and the international system became more complex in the 20th Century, the notion of sovereignty became equally more blurred.  Sovereign states created multilayered trade and communication networks between each other requiring a large measure of cooperation and mutual respect.  It became typical for trade and economic interests to drive state foreign policy so that the necessity of cooperation curtailed some of the competitiveness among states.  The example of the postal service highlights the need for international cooperation and the erosion, however minimal, of limitless sovereignty.  States exercised their power to establish a postal service internally, but for this service to be truly effective it needed to go beyond its national boundaries.  The Universal Postal Union established in 1874 brought together a collection of national postal services to create an efficient international service.  As a consequence each state had to accept the mutually agreed rules and guidelines of this international body in order to make this service effective.

The Universal Postal Union, or the International Telegraph Union in 1865, marked a trend towards institutionalizing international cooperation, beginning from an economic compulsion but inevitably ending in the 20th Century in the spheres of the political, military and strategic.  Institutionalized international cooperation was directly linked to the emergence of the modern day nation-state as a fixed and non-transient entity.

**From cooperation to collective security**

The balance of power system in Europe and the need for international cooperation among the leading nation-states did not prevent the Great War from igniting in 1914.  The reasons and steps to the war have been comprehensively documented by historians.  What is of significance here is the lessons learned from it.  A school of thought, referred to as utopian idealists by its critics, emerged to argue that the balance of power system failed because it left international security to the unstable fluctuations of the power and perceptions of states and linked cooperation to the demands of the existing diplomatic as well as economic market.  The proposal was to establish an institution, guided by fixed principles, which managed international relations.

This progressive notion, while dismissed as idealist, was adopted by no other than the president of the world’s then emerging power, the USA.  President Woodrow Wilson, a sophisticated Princeton professor proposed a vision of a new world order that would transform Europe.  This vision, which Wilson outlined in January 1918, became known as the fourteen points for peace.  There were two key elements to this vision: The right of self-determination and the notion of collective security.  Both were to be the starting points for an assault on traditional perceptions of sovereignty.

The right of national self-determination was controversial because it directly challenged the notion of sovereignty as understood by the European powers of the time.  The Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Ottoman Empire were two examples of multinational states comprised of many national minorities.  The idea that states would be formed on the basis of ethnic or national ties, which we take for granted today, creates many problems for the world order.  As a start, the idea challenges the possibility that people can live together on the basis of the rule of law and citizenship regardless of ethno-religious factors.  But the right to self-determination was to have a more subtle impact that was devastating by questioning what is understood as legitimate state actors and its reverberations continue to be relevant today.  Effectively it meant that the international community recognized the rights of national groups, even if they were stateless, and was responsible for upholding them collectively.  Previously, it had been accepted that each recognized state was responsible for the rights of people living within its boundaries.

The devastation of the Great War convinced Wilson and other liberals that freedom, self-determination and law would safeguard peace because injustice and oppression were the direct causes of war.  Liberals were indeed struck by the lack of any standard of laws in international diplomacy.  This new approach, for example, demanded upon states openness and transparency in their relations with each other and Wilson’s first point stressed the need for “Open covenants of peace, openly arrived at, after which there shall be no private international understandings of any kind but diplomacy shall proceed always frankly and in the public view.”[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn3" \o ")

Liberal idealists had falsely believed that the League of Nations would be the absolute international authority that upheld collective security.    But the collective security system had more inherent failures that went deeper than the institutional failures of the League of Nations because it was based upon an erroneous assumption that states will act against their interest for the good of the collective.

**From Realism to the UN**

After World War Two the United Nations Organization (UN) replaced the League of Nations and was created as a more serious effort to create an international organization that would safeguard against war and uphold a degree, however minimal, of world justice.  The value of international cooperation following two world wars in the twentieth century increased dramatically following the immense human and material devastation.  With developments in nuclear weapons, the risk of another all out war threatened the existence of mankind altogether.

But the post-WWII era was not dominated by liberal thinking, as realism had emerged as the most dominant school of thought in international relations in the twentieth century.  Realism basically portrays the state as a selfish, competitive actor that as a rule always places its interests above any other state and above the will of international organizations.  The only limit to the actions of a state is the fear of retaliation.  Power thus became the central element in the definition and status of any state in the world system.

The first and most important critic of liberal assumptions was EH Carr through his highly influential book, ‘The Twenty Years Crisis’ (1939).  Carr established a new framework of thought in international relations thinking and it was he who coined the term ‘utopian’ as a rebuke to liberals.  The reality, for Carr, was that the nature of politics and society was a conflict of interests.  The world was divided between the haves and the have-nots.  Instead of focusing on abstract and lofty ideals, the world around us exists on the basis of tangible resources of which there is always a limited quantity.  Because there is never enough of things to go around, those who have the resources aim primarily to keep what they have “and therefore promote ‘law and order’ policies, attempting to outlaw the use of violence while the ‘have-nots’ have no such respect for the law.”[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn4" \o ")

Despite the compelling arguments of the realist school, some of which remain to this day almost impossible to dispute, the hope of creating a peace promoting international organization was brought back to reality by national governments in 1945.  The spark was lit as early as August 1941 by the United States and Britain with the Atlantic Charter.  This document was a commitment that the two countries “seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other.”  Leaders of the two countries announced their wish to see “sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them.”[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn5" \o ")

The major allies in the war (the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and China) met at conferences including Teheran, Dumbarton Oaks and Yalta throughout the war to establish a framework for the new world order.  The signing of the Charter of the United Nations on 26 June 1945 at the United Nations Conference on International Organization in San Francisco initiated the body’s formal establishment.  The Charter came into force on 24 October 1945.  The first 51 countries to sign the United Nations Declaration were mostly countries that had already declared war on the Axis powers.

**Aspirations and Objectives**

The UN is in fact a highly complex and overlapping institution that deals with the political, social, economic, educational, legal and cultural.  It is, unlike anything before it including the League of Nations, a genuine world body.  It is also an organic institution that constantly evolves to adapt to changing times.  This aspect of the UN is a source of strength and weakness because it cannot but reflect the contradictions, and sometimes hypocrisy, of the international system.

The spread of secular nationalism in 18th Century Europe led to a new sense of humanism and universal rationalism that replaced traditional religion.  It was thus unsurprising that the founders of the UN would draw from this aura to assume that justice, human rights, freedom, democracy and equal social and economic opportunities were all universal values that all people of the world aspired to.  The moral fervor guiding the UN after WWII directly challenged the undisputed right of the state to sovereignty without responsibility by eliminating the state’s unquestioned right to initiate war against other states, violate human rights, neglect the welfare of citizens and damage the ecosystem.  This apparent onslaught on the state’s monopoly is visible in the opening line of the UN Charter’s preamble: “We the peoples of the United Nations…”[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn6" \o ")

The UN’s more controversial elements are found in the Charter’s “faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.”  Toward this end the Charter would “employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples.”[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn7" \o ")  States that signed the Charter probably took such lofty aims lightly at the time yet eventually such principles opened the door for UN intervention where the state was perceived to have seriously failed in upholding the security of its citizens and the social and physical well-being of its people.  But perceptions are open to interpretation.  During the Cold War period for example, the Soviet Union and the USA varied in their interpretation of the Middle East conflict, with the USA emphasizing the aggression of the Arab parties and Moscow raising Israeli violations at the Security Council.  This superpower tug-of-war at the UN ended with the demise of the USSR giving the USA exclusive rights to the definition of perceptions regarding the behavior of states.

The events leading to the Secretary-General transition from Butros-Butros Ghali to Kofi Anan in the 1990s appear to strengthen the view of a US-dominated UN.  While both are African, the two men differed considerably in their vision (and some would argue reputation) of the UN.  Clinton’s feisty Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, Clashed openly with the Coptic Egyptian.  In fact Ghali accused Albright in his writings of insulting and humiliating him publicly on many occasions.[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn8" \o ")  When Ghali’s term ended in 1996 the US promoted a quiet, unassuming bureaucrat, Kofi Anan, to replace him.  Hard as Washington tried to polish the image of the West African problems remained.  Even putting his personal ethics aside, the major criticism of Anan was that he adopted a strategy of never antagonizing the US, which Ghali never hesitated in doing.

In fairness to Anan, critics of Ghali point to the fact that despite the lofty aspirations of the UN, the Charter’s conclusion is unequivocal: “Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter…”  Only in case one country initiates a blatant act of war against another does the UN have the right to demand a proactive role.

**The Security Council**

The UN was formed out of six principle organs: The General Assembly, The Security council, The Economic and Social Council, The Trusteeship Council (no longer in operation), The International Court of Justice and The Secretariat.  The central decision-making organ is the Security Council and according to the Charter all the UN member-states confer upon it “primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security, and agree that in carrying out its duties under this responsibility the Security Council acts on their behalf.”

The ten non-permanent members of the 15-member Security Council are elected by the General Assembly.  In this representation of the General Assembly in the Security Council is significant, twice outnumbering the permanent members and allowing some legitimacy to the democratic process of the UN.  The passing of a decision by the Security Council requires nine affirmative votes out of fifteen.  Perhaps the main issue regarding the voting is article 27, which states that the nine affirmative votes must include the “concurring votes of the permanent members.”  In other words if the ten non-permanent members should vote yes for a resolution and the 5 permanent do not concur then the motion fails.  Clearly, this highlights that the balance of power in the voting process rests firmly with the permanent members.

More controversially is that the interpretation of that section requires all the permanent members to agree.  This has given rise to what we commonly call the veto.  Although the veto power is not explicitly stated, it is the emphasis on the concurrence of its permanent members which make it obvious.  This indirect ‘veto’ power has been at the center of much controversy at the UN Security Council.

Chapter VI states in article 34 that “The Security Council may investigate any dispute, or any situation which might lead to international friction or give rise to a dispute, in order to determine whether the continuance of the dispute or situation is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security.”  Where the dispute appears destined to explode into confrontation or a particular party embarks on actions that are deemed aggressive and a threat to peace the Security Council is authorized to adopt further measures in Chapter VII.  This includes its right to demand from the conflicting parties to adopt ‘provisional measures’ and the failure by any one of the parties to do so would be registered by the Security Council.  The Security Council in this case is empowered to demand economic and other types of sanctions and the “severance of diplomatic relations.”  Article 42 alludes to the use of military force should sanctions prove inadequate.  For the first time, and unlike the League of Nations, the UN was given in principle at least military capability to take direct action against those who violate international law.

**Non-Security Council options**

The most typical view of the UN is that it exists to settle disputes and conflicts when and where they arise.  However, Chapter IX of the UN Charter on International Economic and Social Co-operation contains important preventative roles and functions for the UN.  Article 55 states the UN would endeavor to “promote: a. higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development.”  The preventative role of the UN has become almost forgotten by the media and public opinion.  Critics point out that the Economic and Social Council and the UN as a whole has been wholly ineffective in preventing famine in Africa and other third world catastrophes.  Moreover, as economists will point out today, the gap of wealth between the rich countries and poor countries has actually grown in recent years.

The UN has experienced similar failings in its quest to uphold international law.  International law implies that there is a ‘higher’ law that supersedes the law of each state.  In principle virtually all states reject this idea although for the media and political expediency all states refer to international law when it is favorable to their demands or justifies their position in a dispute.

Based in The Hague since 1946, the International Court of Justice was founded as a permanent court, unlike other judicial bodies established to deal with specific issues.  Failing to comply with ICJ decisions may result in any action being taken by the Security Council, which may include military action.  However, in reality the International Court of Justice has been much undermined and even the Charter limits its authority.  Article 95 states that “Nothing in the present Charter shall prevent Members of the United Nations from entrusting the solution of their differences to other tribunals…”[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn9" \o ")

According to the functions of the Court only States may apply and appear before the court.  In addition, the court only has jurisdiction if a. both parties in a dispute agree to refer to the court either directly or b. through a clause in a pre-existing treaty between which states that in case of dispute the matter would be referred to the ICJ.  An indication of the Court’s weaknesses is evident by the fact that the ICJ may not deal with grave human rights violations if they take place within a country unless the state responsible takes itself to court.  Herein lays a major criticism that the court gives precedent to the legal rights of a state over the rights of individuals and people.  What kind of redress would victims of a multinational company operating in the third world get?  Where would victims of torture go?  What judicial body in the UN would people who have been made stateless go to?  The UN offers the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for such violations.  There are also, particularly in the last decade, special war crimes tribunals such as the one dealing with the Former Yugoslavia.  But there is no permanent body dealing with such issues.

**The evolving UN**

Despite these limitations the UN has taken on a number of endeavors and duties and attempted to bypass the limitations of sovereignty, with a mixed bag record of successes and failures.  The series of UN actions in the Middle East alone since 1948 charts a turbulent course with a considerable shift in the nature of the UN’s operations.

The first UN mission began work in 1949 after the first Arab-Israeli war.  An observer team was created, known as United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, and deployed along Israel’s borders, comprising of 600 unarmed military personnel from Belgium, France, US and Sweden.  The practice of using troop members from Security Council states was later abandoned as it was deemed inappropriate.  The role of these troops was strictly to observe the borders.  These troops, whose presence was agreed upon by all parties involved, originally wore the national uniforms of their home countries but eventually UNTSO adopted the famous blue helmets or berets that were later to become the symbol of peace-keeping troops all around the world.  UNTSO was to set an example for future operations but there were some substantial criticisms of the mission.  The most serious contention was that UNTSO simply helped to freeze the conflict and played no part in resolving it.  The crisis was to re-erupt in 1956 and 1967, with Israel occupying more land.

In 1956, Britain and France, allied with Israel, attacked Egypt in what is known as the Suez Crisis.  Britain and France wanted control of the Suez Canal and a minimum degree of colonial influence.  For Israel this was simply a good reason to strike Egypt.   Egypt’s saving grace was that both the USSR and the USA criticized the attack and condemned the aggressors.  The result was that Britain and France had to retreat, although there was no Security Council resolution since both were members and used their veto power.  But the General Assembly did endorse the sending of UN Emergency Forces (UNEF I).  These were effectively peacekeeping forces that were deployed for the first time in the UN’s history.  Their role was to oversee the disengagement of forces from the canal zone and to serve as a buffer between Israel and Egypt.  In dealing with this specific crisis UNEF’s peace-keeping mission was evaluated as being successful.

The relative success of UNTSO and UNEF I, both in the Middle East, emboldened the Security Council to adopt more complex and meaningful tasks in world events.  Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjold staked his personal position by involving the UN in the Congo crisis in the 1960s.  However, the problems of this large African state were immense and the result was that 20,000 peace-keeping forces (ONUC) had to be used and a huge army of UN civil administrators utilized to keep the fragmented state functioning.  Such large scale involvement proved to be extremely costly and panic alarms began to ring as the conflict threatened to be long term.  This was the first practical lesson that the UN could not run countries, especially in wartime.

The Congo crisis was a major dent in the UN’s reputation although it was not the first.  The Korean debacle of 1950 was unique because the USSR was boycotting its seat on the UN Security Council in protest at the sitting of the Taiwanese rebel government in place of a representative from mainland communist China.  Thus in effect all the members sitting on the Council were US allies.  The US took quick advantage of this situation and passed a resolution calling for all UN members to provide military assistance to South Korea in the face of aggression from North Korea.  The USSR thereafter learned that it was foolhardy to abandon this body as a means of protest.  The Secretary-General at the time Trygve Lie had openly criticized the USSR for its support of the communist North Korea.  As a result the Soviet delegation chose to simply ignore him since then, greatly undermining his effectiveness as Secretary-General.  Because of this situation he eventually resigned and later Secretary-Generals were careful not to openly antagonize any member of the Security Council.

During the Cold War some 500,000 blue helmets served in various areas around the world as peace-keepers.  The best definition of peace-keeping is provided by former Under-Secretary-General Marrack Goulding who describes it as: “United Nations field operations in which international personnel, civilian and/or military, are deployed with the consent of the parties and under United Nations command to help control and resolve actual or potential international conflicts or internal conflicts which have a clear international dimension.”[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn10" \o ")

Unlike the aberration of Korea, peace-keeping troops during the Cold War have been virtually always used to preserve the status quo.  Their intended purpose was to create the conditions of stability in order to give time for the actors to reach a political settlement to the dispute.  Once again a good example of this attempted role relates to the Middle East conflict and specifically the hostilities between Syria and Israel.  The last major war between them was in 1973 although fighting continued until 1974 with the Syrians using Palestinian fighters as proxy along the borders with Israel.  However, with US mediation – the Soviet Union was kept out of these negotiations – the Syrians and Israelis agreed to disengage with the ultimate purpose of stopping fighting in the disputed area.

The US-brokered deal led to the dispatching of the United Nations Disengagement Observation Forces (UNDOF) on 31 May, 1974.  These forces remain in the Golan Heights.  The mission of UNDOF was to create a buffer zone and monitor the level of militarization in the restricted zones.  1,250 armed soldiers including 90 military observers were employed by the operation.  But between 1977 to the present no major incidents were reported.  On the face of it the operation appears to be a successful.

Peace-keeping missions served a useful purpose yet even such a limited role in the examples above became undermined toward the end of the Cold War with no new peace-keeping missions in the ten years between 1978 and 1988.  The freeze on peace-keeping missions was concurrent with the Reagan era in the USA.  He and his right-wing administration saw the UN as a hotbed for communist sympathizers and an institution that gave an undue voice to petty dictators and anti-Western regimes.  More specifically, Reagan understood that by serving to maintain the status quo, peace-keeping operations were legitimizing the existence of communism and prolonging the existence of the USSR.  Washington also ceased all funding to the UN between 1985 and 1987, leaving the institution almost bankrupt.

But the UN may have been down but it was not dead.  By an odd twist of history it was revived by the last president of the USSR Mikhail Gorbachev.  In the late 1980s Gorbachev had introduced far reaching reforms in his country, having recognized that the Soviet state was facing bankruptcy and collapse.  Central to Gorbachev’s agenda was the realization that the Soviet Union was over-committing itself in the various regional struggles around the world.  For example, he did not see how involvement in far away Africa or Nicaragua was of any direct benefit to the Soviet Union.  Most damaging and closer to home was the entanglement in Afghanistan, which he and his associates were certain was a gross error of judgment made by his predecessors.  Soviet withdrawal from regional conflicts would ease the strain on the Soviet economy by freeing resources and allowing focus on the internal reforms.

Gorbachev introduced New Thinking in 1987 to the world at the UN.  He pledged to pay the UN debts of $200 million owed by the USSR and declared that the international body could play a central role in the new world order, especially in his abandonment of class conflict as an inevitability.  This conflict would be replaced by humanitarianism and internationalism, the very principles upholding the UN.  In reality, there were many regional conflicts that the USSR and USA wanted to get out of with minimum cost and impact.  Thus both superpowers came to a gradual agreement in 1987-1988 that the UN would take over many of the peace-keeping requirements around the world as they disengaged.  Reagan thus followed Gorbachev by changing US policy of berating and undermining the UN by highlighting its positive role.  In 1988 the US also began payments to the UN of some of its dues, which was vital for its practical existence.

The first involvement of the UN that ended the ten year hiatus was to be in Afghanistan with a limited operation to provide humanitarian relief to Afghani refugees who were stranded on the border with Pakistan.  In that same year, 1988, there were other UN operations in former Cold-War hotspots, including Angola, which had been ravaged by almost twenty years of fighting.  Also in that year the UN supervised the ceasefire and disengagement border between Iran and Iraq after eight years of terrible fighting that left millions dead or wounded.

**Post-Cold War UN**

After the Cold War the UN began displaying a radically new pattern of involvement that was a shift from the traditional observation and disengagement roles in military zones.  This began in Latin America where for the first time it supervised elections in Nicaragua after a long and brutal civil war in which the US supported armed guerrillas, that some would call terror groups, against a left-wing government that it considered would potentially join the Soviet camp.  Such actions presented a new interpretation of its peace-keeping role after the Cold War, both in the type and in the scope of the operations it undertook.  While during the cold war the understanding and application of peacekeeping was limited, it had grown to include “verification of troop withdrawal, the organization and observation of elections, the voluntary surrender of weapons, and human rights verification.”[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn11" \o ")

Essentially, the UN was becoming involved beyond state-to-state conflicts by becoming entangled in conflicts or disputes within a state.  In 1988 the UN was charged through UNGOMAP of supervising and verifying the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan and laying the framework for rebuilding not only the state’s infrastructure but also its social and political pillars.  But the Afghanistan mission highlighted weaknesses.  The stated objective of holding elections in that war-torn country was not followed through nor was the disarming of the various guerrilla groups that had rebelled against the Soviet army.  The mission was used to simply provide a face-saving mechanism for Soviet withdrawal.  This failure has been partially blamed for subsequent tragic events in Afghanistan including the emergence of the Taliban.

The UN also oversaw a similar case in Angola in December 1988, in this case of Cubans forces, who had been supporting the government.  In this instance the UN did follow through on elections in 1992 but the defeated UNITA refused to accept the result and resumed fighting.  Here the UN and the West failed to take adequately firm action against UNITA, which among its violation was forcing young boys to fight and the rape of young girls in villages it conquers.  The fighting there did not stop until the death of the UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi recently.

ONUCA was founded to stop the fighting in Nicaragua and among its most important functions was to disarm the Contras.  This was the first time in its history that the UN was physically involved in the task of collecting and destroying weapons.  ONUCA observers often worked in a tense and dangerous environment.  ONUVEN was created to supplement the work of ONUCA and it was the first example of UN management of elections inside a recognized state, “an extraordinary intrusion”[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn12" \o ") in terms of our notion of sovereignty.  ONUCA provided all the security arrangements necessary that ensured operational freedom, securing election booths and monitoring for intimidation tactics.  Moreover, to ensure fairness ONUVEN organized for all parties equal access to state television and radio broadcasts.  Overall the experience was considered successful and provided inspiration for election monitoring in Haiti 1990.

By the early 1990s the UN had taken on controversial tasks by acting within a recognized state as a sort of police force and ministry of the interior by organizing and monitoring elections.  The UN was also, from Afghanistan to Central America, disarming groups that were fighting within a country, which differs and is more difficult than keeping a de-militarized zone between two warring states.

**Iraq and the unipolar world**

The first major post-Cold War incident was the Gulf War.  On August 2, 1990 the Iraqi army attacked and conquered Kuwait practically overnight.  This was the first time in the modern world and particularly in the post-Cold War era that one UN member had blatantly attacked and fully occupied another UN member.  Twelve Security Council Resolutions were passed relating to demands on Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait and adhere to basic principles of international law.  The firmness of the action was notable with the invoking of Chapter VII of the UN Charter.  As a first step, Resolutions 661 (on Aug.6) and 665 (August 25) established economic sanctions.  By November 29, after failure of Iraqi compliance the UN produced Resolution 678 authorizing ‘all necessary means’ for ending the occupation.

In February 1991 Kuwait was liberated, and the UN had taken center stage as an international organization.  There was praise for the UN that hope was restored to small countries that were so dependent on international law for their existence.  Some concerns emerged however that the US used its international dominance and the UN Resolutions to place itself in the Gulf area.  In a sense the UN has further incensed the outrage of the Arab world after years of inaction on the Palestinian issue.  This negative impression of the UN was further imprinted when the US attempted to push through further Resolutions in 2003 to justify another war on Iraq.  When France threatened to veto on the basis that there was no legal justification for such a war, the US went ahead regardless.

This episode highlighted the ability of the world’s only remaining superpower to override the UN.  Throughout the 1990s it has been generally accepted that while the US turns a blind eye to Russian action in Chechnya it gains Russian acquiescence in the Middle East and Balkans in particular.  Cynics and critics have argued that in fact the only reason the US began showing a more favorable attitude towards the UN was because it calculated that there could be so little resistance to its wishes.  Weiss noted in reference to the Iraq War in 1990: “Washington promised financial aid and debt relief to a number of developing countries for their votes and withdrew aid commitments to Yemen in retribution for its opposing the use of force.”[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn13" \o ")

Perhaps one of the most controversial resolutions after the liberation of Kuwait was Resolution 688, passed on April 5 1991, after the Iraqi defeat.  An uprising in Iraq against the regime was met by typically ruthless suppression and the situation was not helped by US president Bush who implied that the people’s uprising would be supported by Washington, only later to clarify when the regime retaliated that this support was meant to be only moral and not military.  The Kurds in the north fled their villages and preferred to risk death through famine and cold rather than face Iraq’s repressive organs.  As a response to the human tragedy the US and its allies established safe havens, protected by the military, in order to enable relief efforts to reach them within Iraq.  Critics pointed to the complications of this action because the UN was taking on the role of protectors of citizens from their own state.  This debate was particularly pertinent in the light of the long standing bid by the Kurds for independence.  Doubt was raised that if the UN traditionally did not actively and directly guard citizens from the repressive organs of their state, was it considering the Kurds as a separate entity and defined national group?

This grey area caused sufficient confusion to greatly disturb the Turkish government, which had problems with its own Kurdish minority.  Some interpretations suggest that the ‘no fly zones’ that were established by the US through the UN deliberately included Shi’ite areas in the south in order to satisfy Turkish concerns of a hidden agenda to allow the Kurds to create a separate entity.  But by including the Shi’ites the message had further undermined the notion of sovereignty and raised questions about why the UN does not adopt measures to protect a host of other oppressed people around the world.

The safe haven idea was to be later reproduced in the Yugoslav Republic for much of the 1990s.  The breakdown of Yugoslavia posed perhaps the most serious challenge to the UN’s authority and prestige in the 1990s.  The fact that this was also a problem on European soil was also significant.  The horrors and human tragedies of displacement and the targeting of innocent civilians, later to become genocide, were displayed on television screens everywhere.  The most violent and turbulent situation was to take place in Bosnia-Herzegovina.  Initially there was cynicism that Europe and the US were not particularly interested in the creation of a Muslim state in Europe.  Once Catholic Croatia had been secured some feared that there was a tacit hope that Serbia would quickly silence Bosnia-Herzegovina.  But this was clearly not the case especially as the ‘silencing’ process involved massive human rights violations.  Initially 1500 UN soldiers were assigned to Sarajevo but this clearly was not adequate and a further 8000 soldiers were dispatched to protect humanitarian conveys and escort refugees and other war victims.  But the situation on the ground became increasingly chaotic and it was clear that the UN could not cope alone.  NATO became involved in enforcing a no-fly zone for Serbian aircraft.

The inclusion of NATO was seen as recognition of the UN’s ineffectiveness.  However, the no-fly zone policy was extremely limited.  It did not stop Serbian and Croat military and paramilitary forces from carving up Bosnia, nor did it stop the atrocities taking place on the ground.  The lack of action by the UN and the Western powers arguably made the situation on the ground worse.  The Bosnian Serbs intensified their policy of ethnic cleansing, driving people out of their home and slaughtering men, women and children.  Some of the worse human rights violation in Europe had taken place in the early 1990s since WWII.  The small UN force on the ground ended up being more of a hindrance than a help as it prevented NATO aircraft from taking more aggressive actions because of fear of retaliation against the UN personnel on the ground.

The matter was made more tragic when the UN established so-called ‘safe havens’ in specific areas and towns in Bosnia because it quickly became apparent that these ‘safe havens’ were among the most dangerous in the country. The ‘safe haven’ situation was made more meaningless when in the summer of 1995 two enclaves in East Bosnia were attacked and taken by Bosnian Serbs, who began a wave of massacres.  Srebrenica witnessed a large scale massacre in Europe, with horrendous TV images.  The UN soldiers who were supposed to be enforcing the safe haven simply pulled out, taking no action against the aggressors.

In that same year Serbs had also captured and chained UN personnel to strategic outposts, preventing NATO air strikes.  It was symbolic of the lack of the respect held for the organization as the Serbs seemed to be almost mocking the UN as a whole.  Even the humanitarian mission was undermined as Serb fighters raided supplies and supply conveys as UN soldiers simply stood by and watched.  According to the mission soldiers were given specific rules of engagement in which they could only shoot if their lives were in danger.  Since stealing the aid did not necessary threaten their lives the militias simply walked in and took the goods without being challenged.

The Somalia episode in the early 1990s was another situation where the UN attempted to fill the vacuum of a non-existent state.  As a result of the fighting, there were no borders, no discernable groups to deal with but warlords and gang leaders fighting simply for more power.  For Boutros Ghali there was no doubt that the UN had to get involved.  This was at the very least a humanitarian challenge.  But for humanitarian aid to get through it would have to at least make sure the ground was safe.  In August 1992 up to 4,000 troops were authorized to provide reinforcement to the United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I).  The initial goal was to protect the delivery of relief provided by the Red Cross which was under threat from bandits and thieves.  The deteriorating situation required more and in December 1992 finally supported Security Council Resolution 794 which ultimately resulted in a coalition of over twenty countries and 30,000 troops to the UN Task Force (UNITAF).

This operation, which the US called Operation Restore Hope, was sold to the American public as a genuinely benevolent mission.  UNITAF initially enjoyed limited success as it did not stop the fighting leading to a second and more controversial Resolution 814, authorizing UNOSOM to disarm the Somali Warlords with whatever force necessary.  This was to be a controversial operation in many respects.  For the first time US troops joined a coalition that was not to be under the command of a US general, although in reality they were not fighting forces but provided logistical back-up.  In addition, the UN was to halt what was effectively a civil war and the organization was increasingly acting without the consent of states involved in the conflict.

There were tens of thousands of soldiers deployed but US public turned against the mission with scenes of dead Marines dragged through the streets of Mogadishu.  Clinton, in his populist style, feared a backlash and soon after ordered an American retreat.  The operation had been a failure and more significantly the consequences led to a major conflict between the US administration and the UN.

Clinton and his advisors placed the blame on Boutros Ghali for dragging him and the US into a war situation that was not winnable.  The experience had seemed to make the US more convinced than ever that it could never agree to its soldiers being placed under the command of another country or organization.  What started off as Operation Restore Hope ended with little achieved at the cost of $4 billion and no end to the fighting.  Unfortunately, after the bad experiences of its interventions, genocide was taking place in Rwanda also in East Africa that was one of the largest cases of mass killings in human history.  Estimates place the number of deaths at 800,000 of the country’s Tutsi’s by the rival Hutus.  There were also 4 million people who were displaced since the killings began in April 1994.  While this massive killing spree was taking place it was almost forgotten that UN forces were actually based on the ground.  UNAMIR (Assistance Mission in Rwanda) was working for 8 months in the country to achieve a ceasefire between Hutus and Tutsis when the killings began.  When the violence erupted the UN commander on the ground was actually pleading for greater intervention but the Security Council decided to actually reduce its presence.  Later the Security Council did authorize a French-led operation in Rwanda under Resolution 929.  However, what came to be known as Operation Turquoise, had limited objectives.  Later in Burundi, another genocide there which led to the loss of 150,000 lives also met with a minimal response.

Overall 1 million people were brutally murdered in the space of a few years in Africa with very little action taken.  It would be sad if racism is a factor here in the decisions taken by the northern powers of the UN.  Just as sad would be if the powers only acted on the basis of what is in their national interest.

**Is the UN worth it?**

Charting the UN’s history reveals a long list of failures.  The experience of sanctions in the 1990s in itself highlights that the UN failures sometimes have led to the death of hundreds of thousands of people.  It is estimated that the lives of 100,000 were damaged by the sanctions in Haiti in 1993, with most of the worst off tending to be children.  While there is still no specific data it is estimated that the impact on Iraq has been much worse, with allegations that hundreds of thousands of children and elderly may have died during the 1990s because of shortages in food and medicine.

The new resurgence of UN activity after the Cold War was to lead to an increase in the organization’s spending from an average of a few hundred million US dollars a year and 10,000 troops to a figure of some 70,000 on active duty and costs in the range of US$4 billion.  However, the contribution of member states upon which the UN was so dependent, were not always forthcoming so that the UN was to accumulate debts of some US$3.5 billion.  Although the US at the end of the Cold War began repayments to the UN, it did not pay back all its dues.  Russia too has claimed that its crippled economy has made it unable to pay what it owed despite Gorbachev’s pledge.

Bush Jr. and Clinton continued to express serious misgivings about the UN.  At all levels the UN faced serious allegations of the abuse of funds, whether it was the office of the secretariat hiring consultants or ‘specialists’ for high costs or the scandal of relief employees on the ground re-selling aid supplies that were supposed to be free on the black market to local racketeers.  At the middle management level there are often cases of regional managers and directors greatly exaggerating their costs or hiring ghost workers to acquire large budgets which ultimately gets spent on personal use.

Despite the debts and the relative inefficiency proponents of the institution argue that there is simply no alternative to the UN.  They point out that costs for running the UN are comparatively low when compared to the $375 billion the US spends each year on defense.  Effectively the annual budget of the UN for peacekeeping and humanitarian relief is roughly 1% of the US spending on its war machine.

Looking back, it is possible to judge the 1990s as the decade of lost opportunity.  It would not be fair however to simply blame the UN.  Secretary General Boutros Ghali was aggressively seeking to increase the role of the UN in the management of the new world before he was firmly put in his place by the US administration that called his ambitions grandiose.  The UN itself was not fully equipped as a body after the decade of hibernation in the 1980s.  It also faced the new challenges of nation-building and the resurgence of ethnic violence and internal disputes without clear ideological lines where it became difficult to know exactly who or where the enemy was.

There are today just over a dozen UN peace-keeping operations around the world at the annual cost of some $2.2 billion.   Of those around $180 million are spent on the unresolved conflict between Israel and its neighbors.  The mission in East Timor (UNMISET) alone costs $305 annually.

**Terrorism and the UN**

The most recent challenge to the UN has been that of terrorism, which since September 11 2001 has taken on a new dimension and a new meaning.  The unequaled scale of the attack, the number of terrorists involved, the use of technology and the fact that the attack could hit at the heart of the world’s remaining superpower all indicated that no-one, anywhere was safe.  It is also important to remember that 3000 civilians were killed.  In all respects one cannot deny that this was a devastating single attack.

There were also other significant elements to the attack.  The sophistication, organization and planning involved were at a high level.  At the same time the attacks also outlined a new threat and challenge in the world because it did not come from a state but from non-state actors without an identifiable base.  Anan moved to find a unifying role for the UN calling “terrorism a global menace.  It calls for a united, global response.  To defeat it, all nations must take counsel together and act in unison.  That is why we have the United Nations.”[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn14" \o ")

But there are problems that have stood in the way of a full consensus on the issue of terrorism.  The first is the lack of consensus on the meaning of the term itself.  The US wishes to tailor a description that will isolate what Muslim states consider as resistance groups by placing the emphasis on non-state actors and suicide bombings.  Most Muslim states want the official definition to include ‘state terrorism’ and the use of indiscriminate hi-tech weaponry that ends up targeting civilians.

Without agreeing on a definition on terrorism, the UN did endorse “the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense” against terrorism through Resolution 1368.  This initiated a series of resolution which ultimately were taken to give states the right to prevent terrorist actions.  The US took this to mean that pre-emptive action was justified in the war against terror.  Washington also took it as a right to isolate and even remove regimes considered as harboring or supporting terror.

Boutros Ghali has perhaps been the most outspoken Secretary General of the modern era and in his *Agenda for Peace****[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_edn15" \o ")*** initiated an interesting debate about the role of the UN and raised many questions.  First and foremost was the issue of state sovereignty.  What has in the last 300 years been considered an almost sacred right that was beyond discussion was now being placed under the microscope for inspection.  According to the new thinking, states could be attacked for supporting proxy groups that the international community considered as being terrorists.  More controversially, the case of Iraq has indicated that regimes could be removed, with legal justification, if their human rights record does not conform to international standards.  Former Iraqi president Saddam Hussein is currently being tried for using chemical weapons and other human rights abuses against sections of his population.

Terrorism therefore has come to imply support for groups that undertake typical terrorist actions, such as car bombings, and also state terror against its population.  From a Western perspective both are generally considered tightly interwoven.  Traditionally the UN has sought the support of the parties on the ground to enter a conflict zone and impose either a humanitarian mission or cease-fire.  Is it realistic that in the modern era the UN could forcibly remove a terrorist-supporting regime and place a government in its place without taking into account the internal factors that could lead to civil war and thus more bloodshed?  The answer is yes according to the new vision of the UN and the international community if the aim is to send a clear message to all regimes and states around the world that no longer will actions that threaten regional and international stability or contravene basic human rights standards go unpunished.

**Conclusion**

For many people in the Middle East the UN has long been considered a failed institution, with more than half a century of conflict in that region.  In the 1990s the people of the Balkans came to a similar disdain for the institution.  The UN was also to have equally disastrous failures in East Africa in the post-Cold War era.  Perhaps as a consequence, there is consensus in the international community that there may be a need for a more proactive role of the UN regardless of traditional perspectives on the sovereignty of member states.  This became more so in light of the September 11 attacks in New York.

Between 2004 and 2005 a flurry of UN Resolutions were passed related to the Middle East that once again pushed the boundaries of the organization’s scope of activities.  Most noticeable were Resolutions 1559 and 1595 that related to disarming, or de-commissioning as it is known, and a pioneer mission to investigate the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafic Hariri.   While some in the Middle East have considered these controversial, in fact it is evident that the UN has already been for the last decade and a half playing a more direct role in decommissioning, such as in Angola, Central America and Afghanistan.

The Hariri investigation is new aspect of work for the UN but actually falls within the context of the war on terror off-set by the September 11 attacks.  The investigative element was established earlier with the weapons inspections team in Iraq that had the right to go to any part of the country unhindered, despite the defiance of the existing government at the time, which legally was supposed to have sovereign power within its boundaries.  In the case of Lebanon, it seems sometimes forgotten that the Detlev Mehlis-led investigative commission was invited and fully endorsed by the state’s legal and political establishment, respecting the nation’s sovereignty.

Critics may argue that the UN has not only taken on the responsibility of protecting the international community from rogue states but also to protect people from their own governments.  The recent trend of UN actions are represented by some as undermining the notion of sovereignty.  However, there is an equally strong argument to be made that these actions are in fact a step towards the consolidation and building of strong states in the international community, if the definition of a strong state takes popularity and broad and deep representation of its people into the equation.  There is a new but strong conviction at the UN and in the international community that unpopular regimes result in weak states and weak states threaten international harmony and stability.

[[1]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref1" \o ") Chris Brown, Understanding International Relations, Macmillan, 1997

[[2]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref2" \o ") European colonialism and German Nazism pre-empted military regimes and dictatorships in Africa, Asia and Latin America, often using nationalism to persecute domestic minorities or justifying wars against neighboring states.

[[3]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref3" \o ") Source from Yale University internet website: www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/league

[[4]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref4" \o ") EH Carr, *Twenty Years Crisis*, Oxford, 1939

[[5]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref5" \o ") Source from Yale University internet website: www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/20th

[[6]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref6" \o ") Charter found in official UN website, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org/).  All further references to the UN Charter are found in the official UN website.

[[7]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref7" \o ") UN website, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org/).

[[8]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref8" \o ") Ghali Boutros, Unvanquished: A UN-US saga, Random House, 1999.  The book throughout depicts the friction between the UN and US during his period as Secretary General.

[[9]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref9" \o ") www.un.org

[[10]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref10" \o ") Weiss Thomas, Forsythe David and Coate Roger, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Westview, 2004. p.97

[[11]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref11" \o ") *Agenda for Peace*(Report of the Secretary-General), 17 June 1992

[[12]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref12" \o ") Mingst KA and Karns MP, *The United Nations in the Post-Cold War Era,*Westview, 2000.

[[13]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref13" \o ") Weiss Thomas, Forsythe David and Coate Roger, *The United Nations and Changing World Politics*, Westview, 2004.

[[14]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref14" \o ") UN website, [www.un.org](http://www.un.org/)

[[15]](https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role" \l "_ednref15" \o ") *Agenda for Peace*(Report of the Secretary-General), 17 June 1992

**الدولة السّيدة على ضوء الواجبات والتطلعات الدولية ودور الأمم المتحدة الناشئ**

يعكس العالم المعاصر نزاع المصالح بين الدولة، ادراكها لسيادتها المنيعة والنزعة المتزايدة نحو الواجبات والتطلعات الدولية المرتكزة على قيم ومبادئ العولمة. تشير هذه القيم والمبادئ تحديداً الى حقوق الانسان في الميادين السياسية والاقتصادية-الاجتماعية. وتمثّل الأمم المتحدة المنظمة الدولية الرائدة عالمياً، مما يؤدي الى نشوء صراع عنيف بينها وبين الدول-الأمة الفردية. على ضوء الحرب المزعومة ضد الارهاب، لم تكن تطلعات الدولة-الأمّة الى الحصول على سيادتها هشّةً الى هذا الحّد منذ تطبيق النظام الوستفالي في القرن السابع عشر.

يؤدّي الافتقار الى منظمةٍ دوليةٍ قوية الى خلق نظام عالمي فوضوي حيث تغيب السلطة المركزية، مما يعني أن الدول القوية تصبح قادرة على فرض جدول الأعمال الدولي. من الممكن أن تصحح منظمة دولية قوية، بدورها المتصاعد، هذه النزعة، على الرغم من النقد القائل أن الدول القوية باستطاعتها بسط نفوذها على المنظمات الدولية بشكل أكبر من الدول الأضعف منها عسكرياً واقتصادياً. فبالفعل، يبرهن التاريخ أن التعاون ليس خياراً بل حاجة، كما يتجلّى عبر أمثالٍ واضحة في التجارة والاتصالات الدولية.

بالرغم من أن الواقعية كانت المدرسة المهيمنة في مجال العلاقات الدولية خلال القرن المنصرم، خاصة في ما يتعلق بتفسير نزعة الدول الطبيعية للمنافسة، لم يوقف هذا الأمر الرغبة الدولية بانشاء منظمة الأمم المتحدة عام 1945 ورعاية دورها، على الرغم من مرور فترات عصيبة هددت استمرارية المنظمة ككل. بدى البديل عن منظمة الأمم المتحدة خياراً أكثر خطورةً مما ينبغي ليؤخذ بعين الاعتبار، لا سيما بعد مواجهة حربين عالميتين وظهور أسلحة الدمار الشامل، بما فيها الأسلحة النووية.

تكمن قوة منظمة الأمم المتحدة في تركيبتها المتنوعة وفي اطار المبادئ التي يصعب على الدول الفردية تجاهلها، كما تبرز من خلال ميثاق الأمم المتحدة. أصبح العضو الرئيسي لمنظمة الأمم المتحدة، مجلس الأمن، أكثر نشاطاً في التعامل مع المسائل الدولية، لا سيما بعد فناء الاتحاد السوفياتي عند انتهاء الحرب الباردة. عبر العقود، غدى عمل الأمم المتحدة أكثر تخصصاً. تطلبت أول عملية للمنظمة عام 1948، الشرق الأوسط، قوة مراقبة فقط بين الاسرائليين والعرب. مع مرور الزمن، تبنّت مهمات أكثر صعوبةً كضبط التحرر من مناطق الصراع والقيام بدوريات في المناطق غير العسكرية، كما هي الحال في الجولان بين اسرائيل وسوريا.

بعد الحرب الباردة، بدأت منظمة الأمم المتحدة بالقيام بالمزيد من المهمات المثيرة للجدل. ففي اميركا الوسطى، اتخذت دور وزير الداخلية ونظمت الانتخابات. كما بدأت بنزع سلاح الميليشيات كالكونترز. في العراق، فتش فريق تحقيق تابع للأمم المتحدة عن أسلحة الدمار الشامل ومُنح السلطة للدخول الى أي منطقة، بما فيها منازل القائد العراقي في ذلك الحين. يكمن التحدي اليوم في توسيع سلطة منظمة الأمم المتحدة من دون استخدام هذه السلطة بشكل انتقائي أو غير عادل بطريقة تضعف سيادة وحقوق الجماعات الوطنية.

- See more at: https://www.lebarmy.gov.lb/en/content/sovereign-state-light-international-obligations-and-expectations-and-un%E2%80%99s-evolving-role#sthash.UlxP1fwH.dpuf