

The Impact of Contemporary Tensions, Conflicts and War on Regional and International Security: *Case Studies*

Edited by:
Ian Parenteau, Ph.D



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Introduction

Ian Parenteau

The four chapters in this edition of the Martello Papers were presented at the International Forum on Peace, Security and Prosperity (IFPSP) held in Palermo, Sicily, from 17 to 20 March 2024. The theme of the event was “The Impact of Contemporary Tensions, Conflicts and War on Large International Institutions.” This event, which has been held annually in Sicily in a hybrid format since 2022, brings university and military academy students from all over the world, as well as professors and researchers with an interest in the broad topic of peace, security, and prosperity. The 2024 edition drew more than 350 participants from five continents. At a time when the global security situation has been deteriorating for several years and geopolitical tensions are generating very real fractures in the post-war liberal order, the forum is an opportunity for participants to examine these issues together. This event represents a unique occasion for exchanges and discussions that allow us to reflect not only the security aspects of conflicts, which are generally of primary interest to the military, but also the human aspects of violent events. In addition, the forum gives participants a chance to identify the main causes of contemporary conflicts as well as the methods of prevention and containment from the perspective of *positive peace*, an idea introduced by Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung. According to Galtung, peace is a more sustainable form of peace, built on unrelenting investment in economic development, institutions, and mindsets conducive to peace. Positive peace can be used to gauge the resilience of a society, or its ability to absorb shocks without falling or relapsing into conflict.

IFPSP organizers come from universities and military academies in North America, Europe, and Africa. They are supported in their work by public bodies, including the General Staff of the Italian Army, the Canadian Defense Academy, the Fondazione Federico II Palermo, the Fondazione Sicilia, and the Ihnatowycz Family Foundation.

In “What Can a Small State Do? The Importance of Political Investment in the United Nations and International Law,” Caroline Dunton looks at the challenges facing the United Nations, especially the lack of collaboration and the various blocking mechanisms used by large and small states to advance their own national interests to the detriment of the ideal of internationalism that has been at the heart of this institution since its foundation. In light of this, she analyzes the recent case of small(er) states of the Global North, such as Canada, which, in the context of the Israeli military operations in Gaza since October 2023, have not always shown strong solidarity with the decisions taken at the UN General Assembly condemning Israel. She considers that some have done so in order not to break their strategic commitment to the United States and continued for this reason to stand by the Israeli regime. These actions run counter to the UN Charter and international justice, and conceptually constitute a major collective action problem. Instead of working solely to defend their own national interests, she posits that these states should commit themselves to protecting and supporting the UN so that it can better fulfil its mandate and thus gain legitimacy.

In “The Geopolitical Nexus: Assessing the Impact of the Ukraine War on Serbia’s Position in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue,” Bajram Geci, Vesa Blyta, and Zana Hashani seek to assess the potential ramifications of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 on the delicate balance of power in the Western Balkans, with a focus on the ongoing dispute between Serbia and Kosovo. While European countries have shown significant solidarity and provided substantial support, particularly military, to help Ukraine defend its territory, Serbia has adopted a more ambiguous position. It has refused to break off relations with Russia, and in some cases has even sought to strengthen them, while providing some support to Ukraine. The authors describe Belgrade’s diplomatic strategy as pragmatic, indicating that the Serbian government seeks to promote its interests on both fronts. This pragmatic approach has had one consequence: the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue, which was initiated in March 2011

with the objective of normalizing relations between the two countries, has not progressed as quickly as expected.

In “The New Age Space Race: Why ‘World’ Peace Is Not Enough,” Nicholas Dominique aims to examine the historical trajectory of the space race, with a view to identifying the key lessons that must be learned today. In this new era of space exploration and exploitation, a diverse array of state and private actors are engaged, challenging the historical monopoly of a few states. It is imperative that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past. In particular, he urges international organizations, and notably the United Office for Outer Space Affairs, to play a leading role in this area. They must establish rules that guarantee the peaceful development of space, preventing its militarization and nuclearization. The space sector should not serve the national interests of major powers or private companies, but rather the scientific community.

In “*Quo Vadis?* The United Nations and Peace Operations,” Howard G. Coombs analyzes the challenges facing modern UN peacekeeping operations. While he acknowledges that some of the missions carried out by UN peacekeepers in the twentieth century did not comply with its legal obligations and expected conduct, which tarnished the organization’s legitimacy, leading to several valid criticisms, the security challenges of the twenty-first century require that the UN continues to play a central role in preventing the outbreak of conflicts, stopping hostilities, and mitigating the impact of disasters or human violence. To do this, the UN must first clarify the operating environment, then act effectively on the battlefield, using concepts such as gray zones and hybrid warfare. Secondly, it must develop a narrative to explain its actions so that it can bring about lasting peace. Thirdly, it must build partnerships with all the other players involved in peace, such as states, international organizations, and NGOs, to support a comprehensive approach.

What Can a Small State Do? The Importance of Political Investment in the United Nations and International Law

Caroline Dunton

In the long history of global politics—and even the modern state—80 years is a very short time. In 2025, the United Nations will turn 80 years old. While there is a tendency to see the world as it is and expect institutions and forms of order to be eternal, they are both fluid and precarious. They require investment and support from states, which is indeed a collective action problem. Over its lifetime, the United Nations has been met with myriad challenges and experienced a waxing and waning of cooperation and deadlock. Its membership grew successively through the decades of decolonization and then again at the end of the Cold War. It is now a long way away from its origins as a 51-member organization, yet its challenges remain ever so similar, from its structure to its politics to its conflicts over the future of humanity.

As Francine McKenzie writes, the foundation of the United Nations was conceived around “two main elements of peace: national security and individual well-being.”¹ This was a product of a flurry of political engagement from both civil society and Western leadership: “the ideas that circulated were radical and conservative, revolutionary and reactionary. Some proposals called for new beginnings; others wanted to preserve established practices. What united them was the belief that the post-war world had to be a better world than the one that had existed before the war.”² Over nearly 80 years, the United Nations

has struggled against many odds, overcoming each impasse with varying levels of success, but still maintaining a basic buy-in from a majority of members. However, in 2024, as much of the world watches an Israeli assault on Gaza, United Nations (UN) leadership is sounding the alarm on both the devastating human consequences and its own institutional destruction.³ The callous indifference to Palestinian life and support for Palestinian death from powerful, Global North countries represents a sharp contradiction of the founding ideals of the United Nations. Moreover, it is a haunting antithesis to the response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to which these same countries rightfully opposed major violations of UN norms, rules, and laws. This stark difference in responses—and the half-hearted response to the International Court of Justice's (ICJ) recent rulings both on the Occupied Palestinian Territories and on genocide—undermines the UN's ability to operate in support of the ideals in its Charter. As a result, many are simultaneously asking about the future of the UN and its role in international order at a moment where the organization is appearing both increasingly important but also increasingly fragile as larger states behave as if they are above the law.

This chapter is an intervention on that latter question. Specifically, I assess the growing variation in how small(er) states have responded to the current assault on Gaza and argue that some have created a situation wherein not only are they putting the UN at risk, but they also undermine their own interests. According to Faisal Devji, the current crisis of international order—prompted especially by US-led support for Israel—is a moment for a “new internationalism” to emerge, one that appropriately acknowledges, “increasing independence of middle and smaller powers around the world.”⁴ However, many small(er) states in the Global North seem reluctant to break from the United States (US) alignment at their own peril, against both the mandate of the UN and the collective outrage of some states in the Global South. I use the concept of social status in international organizations as an illustrative example of how in doing this, these states are unravelling their own international social fabric. By short-sightedly rejecting the central pillars of the United Nations in their support of American policy and Israeli aggression, these small(er) Global North states undermine their own political structures within which they pursue status and recognition. I begin by conceptualizing key ideas, including that of the small states, the UN's ideological underpinnings and purpose, and status. I then focus on the crisis at hand and discuss conclusions going forward. In

doing so, I make clear that the small states I discuss are stronger together and should work towards a diplomatic united voice that supports the UN's legitimacy.

Small States, Status, and Liberal Internationalism

While many in International Relations have dismissed small states as epiphenomenal, they are, in fact, by most definitions, the majority of the world's 193 UN members. However, there are different ways to operationalize groupings of these states. Global politics should not be reduced to its most powerful states and in the UN context, there is much to learn by looking outside the Security Council's five permanent members (P5).⁵ Following Tom Long, I understand small states in a relational way.⁶ In this case, imagining states solely on material and quantifiable terms is unhelpful. Rather, contexts where asymmetry is present is the defining base of the concept of the "small" state. For example, Long indicates that New Zealand, compared to its Pacific Island neighbours is indeed a larger state.⁷ However, compared to its peers in the Five Eyes or its Western Europe and Others Group peers at the UN, it is a small state. Thus, context matters when discussing small states. Similarly, many would argue that Canada is *not* a small state; after all, Canada is famously fiercely proud of the idea of being a "middle power." While this may be true in some senses, Canada is also small within many of its peer groups. It is both from an economic and population point of view the smallest G7 state. By population, it is also the third-smallest G20 state. While it is in many ways *not* a small state, in most of the social contexts in which it interacts with peers, it is relatively smaller in many ways. Hierarchy is everywhere in global politics, continually made and remade by the social processes of international organizations and institutions.⁸ Hierarchy is also overlapping and complex—context matters—necessitating a relational approach to small states. For the purposes of this chapter and discussion of the future of the United Nations, I therefore have a "big tent" approach to small states, where nearly all states outside of the P5 or those frequently described as "rising powers" can be analyzed.

However, within that big-tent approach, there is conceptual flexibility wherein the concept can be narrowed specifically for analytical context. Indeed, in this study, I refer primarily to small states in the Global North. However, context also matters for specifying which states are "small" in this analysis.

Since state size is very much about power, small states for this purpose refer to those that are relatively small within the Global North but also those that have a “smaller” level of influence in the issue at hand: the UN vis-à-vis Israel and Palestine. From an issue perspective, the United States is obviously the largest power in general in the UN setting. Regional powers in the Middle East also hold greater influence than it would on other issues. States that are smaller by many measures in the Global North are more peripheral to the issue, not necessarily participating in many negotiations outside of places like the General Assembly (or in some cases the Security Council), making them small by their political relevance and context. In UN terms, this includes most member states of the Western Europe and Others Group (WEOG), who caucus and compete for status through seats on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). In literature on small states, friendship, liberal internationalism, and status, these groups—specifically WEOG—are often referred to as peer groups.⁹ This includes states such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, the Netherlands, the Nordic states, Belgium, Spain, and Portugal. As such, these are the states I refer to primarily in this chapter.

Relationality is also important when talking about status and hierarchy, and is increasingly common as an underlying characteristic of how status is understood in recent literature.¹⁰ Taking a relational view of status, I view it as requiring recognition,¹¹ functioning as membership within a club and relative standing within it.¹² This relational view differs from views of status that are simply rankings on material attributes. As Pouliot argues, the hierarchy of status is socially organized based on “norms, identities, practices, rules, standards, responsibilities, duties, privileges, entitlements.”¹³ Status emerges from meaning-making in social organizations—often through diplomacy—and is contingent on the politics of those organizations.¹⁴ As I have written elsewhere, “The criteria by which status is accorded in multilateral settings (and therefore sought) comes from the institutionalized hierarchy set by great powers, and as such, status can be sought via adherence to norms (of liberal order in particular) or opposing them.”¹⁵ Thus, it is important to look at the context of social relations surrounding the particular nature of status being studied. In this case, my conceptual underpinning of small states and of status are aligned—relationality and social context matter. The social, relational, and meaning-driven nature of status is inseparable from the contextual nature required for understanding whether a state is a small state.

To further shape the analysis for these small states, I now turn to the nature of the United Nations itself. The United Nations is the institutional expression of twentieth century liberal internationalism. Its ambitious principles sought to serve the purposes described by McKenzie, as cited in the introduction of this chapter. It was focused on universal equality of peoples, sovereign equality, coexistence, democracy, peace, human rights, justice, and cooperation. However, this has come with two problems. First, as Mark Mazower and other historians have pointed out, the United Nations also served to preserve imperial hierarchy and domination, extending the reach of imperialism in many ways and contradicting the idea of universalism from the start.¹⁶ Second, and relatedly, as Lora Viola writes, the United Nations' universalism has been a "false promise;" in other words, as organizations, institutions, or other instruments of global governance become more inclusive in terms of sovereign equality, they are often increasingly stratified or hierarchical.¹⁷ In this case "The extension of one form of equality comes at the price of another inequality."¹⁸ Over time, through the process of decolonization, the UN expanded, but it did not necessarily become more equal. This is both through Viola's argument about closure but also the pervasiveness of imperial power and the related preservation of certain privileges for the P5. Imperial power has shifted over decades, from Europe to America, but it has remained constant in the way that it both shaped the foundation of the organization through the intertwining of imperialism and liberalism, and the way that major powers, especially the United States, have continued to dominate the institution. As an organization based on sovereign equality and liberal internationalism, it frequently empirically demonstrates the by-design aspects of liberalism, whose main components have only been available to those who qualify as "civilized" or fully human. Even as decolonization attempted to bring more sovereign states into the fold of the UN, imperialism remained, and new forms of imperial-driven inequality developed. As Margot Tudor writes, the bureaucratic nature of peacekeeping from the 1950s to the 1970s took on many of the characteristics of colonial management practices, inherited from leading European colonial powers.¹⁹

In many ways, the UN's principles, as outlined in the charter remain aspirational for many. Adom Getachew describes the ways in which key leaders of anglophone African decolonization were not just seeking self-determination, but rather a new vision of international order and world-making. In doing so, they used the tools of the United Nations and the principle of self-determina-

tion to subvert colonial hierarchy and sovereign inequality.²⁰ While they did not succeed in moving the United Nations towards the universality of its liberal claims, they did change its dynamics significantly. Getachew's work, in combination with those like Viola and Mazower, demonstrates how the United Nations and its aspirations to universal rights for individuals and nations was still hierarchical, exclusive, and unequal. This is not unique to the United Nations; this is a clear component of liberalism and liberal internationalism itself. However, there have been many along the way who have been willing to commit to the fight towards racial and postcolonial equality and see the vision of universalism finally met.

Aggression and Rule Violation: How Are States Responding?

Nearly eighty years after its founding, and now with 193 member states, the United Nations remains hierarchical, and its politics is co-constitutive with global stratification. It is increasingly large, bureaucratic, and complex. Many member states in the Global South aim for its principles of equality and the promises of the post-war universal and peaceful world. While there are many who may dismiss its value in the modern world, it is indeed all we have as a foundation for multilateral global governance. It is the largest and strongest international organization, and it remains a centralized place for diplomacy to operate. Moreover, it is unlikely that a post-war moment like 1945 will ever occur in the foreseeable future and allow for commitments to cooperation from large and powerful states, notably Russia and the United States. It is imperfect and it carries the original sin of liberalism: hierarchy and inequality under the guise of universality. As such, we are stuck with the United Nations for the foreseeable future; that simple fact makes it even more important to fight for. While there have been countless calls for reform since its beginnings, notably with a focus on the Security Council, very few actions have been successful. The Security Council's mandate in the Charter has only been reformed once, with Resolution 1991A XVII increasing the number of elected members from 6 to 10 and formalizing regional groups.²¹ As I have argued with Anjali Dayal, structural reform is unlikely, making political organizing to resist the deadlock of the P5 and the dysfunction of the organization essential.²² One year after making that argument, which was made in the wake of Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, it is ever clearer that with the United States supporting Israeli

attack in Gaza, change to the structure of the UN is increasingly impossible. With two P5 members in favour of Charter violations, Charter amendments are only likely in a hell-freezes-over scenario.

American support for Israeli violence also demonstrates a continued policy of exceptionalism and impunity for the United States and its allies (as Russia also offers parallel policy). This completely undermines the purpose of the United Nations and its ability to meet its mandate. In many ways, the original sins of liberal internationalism are made ever clearer—equality is only for some, and rules only apply to others. This moment of crisis and blatant unilateral attacks on the organization are calling into question its very survival. What does this mean for small(er) states? Small(er) states, that compete for status within the UN, have long acknowledged that the functioning of the organization is in their interest and that multilateralism is essential for their ability to thrive and their ability to navigate hierarchical relations. Even for so-called “middle powers,” this has held true. As Robert Cox wrote at the end of the Cold War, “In modern times, the middle-power role ... has been linked to the development of international organization. International organization is a process, not a finality, and international law is one of its most important products. The middle power’s interest is to support this process.”²³ Even Lester B. Pearson, former prime minister of Canada, saw a functioning United Nations not as idealistic but something that was imperfect and flawed but could not be abandoned, as it was in Canada’s interest for the organization to succeed and not leave the world at the whims of great powers.²⁴

In response to Israeli assault on Gaza, small(er) states have essentially taken four paths. First, some have remained relatively silent on the whole. Second, many (but not all) states in the Global South, notably South Africa, have focused on taking or supporting concrete action that uses the mechanisms of the UN towards peace and towards justice and equality for Palestinians. This includes South Africa’s ongoing case against Israel at the International Court of Justice on the question of genocide.²⁵ This is not the first time that a country with relative impunity has been taken to this Court. In the 1980s, Nicaragua won its case against the United States, and it arguably was both a win for the Global South but also a positive move towards equality in the functioning of the United Nations system. The remaining two paths have been taken by the smaller WEOG states, demonstrating a divide between them. Some, like Norway, Ireland, or Spain have chosen to champion the importance of the United

Nations and its principles and support their applicability to Palestinians, who have surely had the least access to such principles in the lifetime of the UN.²⁶ Others, including Canada, have chosen to stand more closely with the United States and Israel, making material and rhetorical moves to either outright undermine the United Nations or behave in ways so convoluted and contradictory that it is clear that there is, at the very least, a short-sighted disregard for it. For Canada, this has included voting against (though not exclusively) many resolutions on the current conflict in Gaza in the UN General Assembly, leaving it relatively isolated along with the United States. Moreover, it hastily suspended its funding to the UN Relief Works Agency (UNRWA)—before reinstating it in March 2024—following ill-substantiated allegations of employees collaborating with Hamas, later addressed in the UN’s Colonna Report, which called for continued investment in UNRWA.²⁷ Meanwhile, as a counter-example, Norway, Ireland, and Spain (among others) continued their funding of UNRWA to fill the vacuum left by others and continued in 2024 to support a variety of peace proposals and funding schemes for Palestinian refugees and residents of Gaza and the West Bank. Spain has provided similar support as well as leading calls for a ceasefire within the EU.²⁸

Looking to the International Court of Justice specifically, two cases have been ongoing in 2024 that require attention. The first is South Africa’s case on the question of genocide, as mentioned above. Initially, states such as Canada were dismissive of the case, but not all of its peers were. WEOG states have had mixed responses to the initial provisional measures of January 2024, often following the divide described above. Throughout 2024, little substantive change has taken place, despite specific support from countries such as Canada for the Court’s May 2024 order to halt an offensive on Rafah (which was not heeded).²⁹

However, the second case has reached a more concrete conclusion that has been followed by a General Assembly resolution and vote. For analytical purposes, this case allows observers to see specific policy positions in the context of the war outside of just public statements. It is here that we can see the different paths clearly on official records in terms of ICJ decisions. This second case covers the issue of the legal consequences of Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, covering myriad subjects on the post-1967 Israeli occupation. In July 2024, the ICJ issued an advisory opinion declaring that:

Israel's occupation of the Gaza strip and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, is unlawful, along with the associated settlement regime, annexation and use of natural resources. The Court added that Israel's legislation and measures violate the international prohibition on racial segregation and apartheid. The ICJ mandated Israel to end its occupation, dismantle its settlements, provide full reparations to Palestinian victims and facilitate the return of displaced people.³⁰

In September 2024, the General Assembly adopted a resolution (A/Res/ES-10/24) affirming the Court's decision and demanding action on it, which includes a concrete end to the occupation within one year and compliance with both this Advisory Opinion *and* the provisional measures in South Africa's case.³¹ Within the WEOG peer group, the division in voting was clear, reflecting earlier trends. Belgium, Finland, Ireland, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, and Spain voted in favour of the resolution. Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Sweden abstained.³² While they did not join the United States and Israel in voting against the resolution, their decision to abstain from support for a legal decision of such magnitude is still notable. It undermines the legitimacy of the Court's decision-making power. Moreover, it reflects broader patterns of abstention and voting against resolutions on the conflict, especially ones as consequential as A/Res/ES-10/24.

The Pursuit of Status as a Cautionary Tale

For these states, they are playing with fire and creating a rift between themselves and the vast majority of small(er) states in the Global North and South. Not only are they acting in violation of their Charter responsibilities and international law³³ (including their responsibilities to the Genocide Convention), but they are also eroding the UN's legitimacy, leaving themselves to the whims of major powers and their clients. This is not the only danger at hand—they also *need* the United Nations themselves. Their ability to engage in global politics depends on the United Nations not just for its attempted delivery at global peace and security, but also because it is the social backdrop and base fabric in which they relate to others, pursue their interests, demonstrate credibility, and navigate its hierarchy.

The pursuit of status is an excellent example of how states need functioning international organizations. Status is a “core state activity” according to Wohlforth et al. and it is also an “intersubjective process” with “intrinsic rewards.”³⁴ For many states, the pursuit of status has been a function of playing the politics

of institutions and organizations. This is consistent with an understanding of status as social membership rather than simply material attributes. Status as membership and as a social good depends on the existence of credible social spaces. Detracting from that credibility (and functionality) can fracture the social relations that are co-constitutive with global politics itself. Examples of status competitions for small(er) states include campaigns for seats on the UN Security Council or Human Rights Council, participation in particular sustainable development initiatives, or inclusion in peace processes or negotiations. In these types of competitions, public positions on major issues are essential for gaining support. If a state is regularly on the “unpopular” side of an issue, it will struggle to achieve the status it seeks.³⁵

Notably, what many identify as a unifying component of many status competitions is that status itself is defined by the idea of being a “good” state or taking on particular responsibilities effectively.³⁶ This is not morally neutral nor is it simple. Rather, it emerges from the principles of liberal internationalism which structured the creation of both global hierarchies and the organizations that populate them, such as the United Nations. Thus, the core state function of seeking status is about playing a political game of securing recognition for being “good” at liberal internationalism.³⁷ Recognition is fundamental and ontologically prior to status—rather to achieve status, one must be recognized.³⁸ In this case, I take into account two important points. First, liberal internationalism, as described earlier in this chapter, is not a morally neutral framework; rather it is intertwined with imperialism and exclusive by design. Through historical processes (including imperialism), it is the basic political “molecular structure” of the UN. Despite liberal internationalism’s focus on individual rights and freedoms, it does not emerge from altruism but many of its goals are worth pursuing in a universal way. Second, states attempting to be recognized do not necessarily perform the “goodness” of liberal internationalism in genuine ways, though they certainly sometimes do. There are cases where they do pursue liberal goals for all, and cases where they do not. However, in the case of performing “goodness” for status, motive matters less than the process. Rather, the politics of recognition, and subsequently the pursuit of status, depend more on whether they can be socially rewarded and admitted into a club as a result of their policy positions.

Ultimately, liberal internationalism is central to the social fabric of international organizations and being recognized for adherence to it, or being “good”

from that ideological standpoint, in many ways “makes the world hang together.”³⁹ What this means is that the pursuit of status depends on the functioning of international organizations. It is in the interest of states like Canada or Australia to uphold the norms, institutions, laws, and rules of the UN and subsequently international order. The rewards they seek in their own interest depends on continued investment in the system that grants such rewards. By unravelling the fabric of the world they have made, they are shooting themselves in the foot and upending the social structures on which they rely for things like the pursuit of social status and recognition. When states such as those in WEOG are willing to undermine those structures, they put their own individual interests at risk as well as that of others.

Conclusion

The United Nations and the world-making of liberal internationalism are deeply flawed and have demonstrated for nearly 80 years that there is much in their foundations that they have not lived up to, not least of which is how deeply unequal their principles and rights have been applied. However, this does not mean that the pursuit of universal peace, justice, and prosperity are not worth chasing and that it is not worth fighting to uphold the UN’s mandate and international law. At the moment of writing in 2024, many states, especially in the Global North seem willing to undermine it and its credibility through their support, both implicit and explicit, of Israeli military action in Gaza and American justification of it. This is both contradictory, as many of these same countries justly oppose similar Russian violations, but also threatening the very nature of the United Nations in a way that has not been seen in decades.

Absolution and even encouragement for unilateral violent action, violation of international law, and impunity for some and not others are deeply damaging to the entire premise of the United Nations at a moment when its principles are needed more than ever. When states should be seeking to transcend liberalism shortcomings in pursuit of universal rights, peace, and prosperity, they are instead willing to throw the institution away. Living up to the Charter and the demands of international law is, of course, a collective action problem, like many others in global politics. However, this is not just a problem for the UN but also for small states themselves, including those in the Global North. As they are not great powers in the complex hierarchies and processes of interna-

tional order, the necessity of the United Nations for their own interests cannot be overstated. The United Nations does not just grant particular rights and privileges, but it is the social fabric within which much of global politics and its key activities take place.

One of these key activities is the pursuit of status (and recognition). This is only one example, but it is a core state social activity (and key concept in the field of international relations) that for small(er) states, within the current international order, entirely relies on multilateralism and the social landscape created and populated by the United Nations. With a decline of the United Nations, states that rely on it for such social relations are also threatened. When states actively contribute to this decline, they are undermining their own interests, a primary one of which is status, and their own credibility. The United Nations and the nature of the order it co-constitutes is not permanent nor bulletproof. It requires sustained investment yet it is clear that some states, both large and small, are willing to forgo that at their own risk simply to allow for some states to commit grave violations of both international law and our shared humanity. The primary concern of all in this moment should be for human life, most notably of Palestinians in 2024, but one of the most important secondary concerns at hand is the survival of multilateral institutions and all that they hold. The United Nations cannot be optional, both because its principles of peace should apply to all, but also because that is a dangerous precedent, not just for those in distress right now but for all who are not at the top of a hierarchy. As more and more states, big and small, are willing to sacrifice Palestinian life, they also push the UN and its benefits for their own interests towards a dangerous precipice at an escalating speed. If, as the UN charter would obligate, cease-fire, peace, and justice were to begin tomorrow, the damage to the UN would remain and states should know that this has ramifications for all.

In closing, I present an alternative path. As I have noted, smaller WEOG states have taken a diverging approach on the current war in Gaza. This is central to the problem—they cannot invest in their shared interests if they are divided, with some undermining the organization and others supporting its legitimacy. As a group of historically like-minded peers, they are better off diplomatically united than divided. If some are avoiding dissenting from the United States due to the power differential between such a large state and themselves, they could mitigate that by working more closely and using their opportunity for shared diplomatic initiatives and statements. With a focus on protecting and

investing in the organization, these states could make a significant difference in fighting back against erosion of the UN system by working together to politically invest in protecting its legitimacy. Working together rather than apart is in their best interest.

Endnotes

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The Geopolitical Nexus: Assessing the Impact of the Ukraine War on Serbia's Position in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue

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The Western Balkans, a region steeped in a tumultuous history of ethnic tensions and geopolitical rivalries, finds itself once again at a pivotal moment. Against the backdrop of the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the region's fragile equilibrium is being tested as it perhaps never was. In the lead-up to the invasion, ominous signs of impending conflict emerged, with intelligence reports and satellite imagery capturing the ominous sight of Russian troops and heavy artillery converging on the Ukrainian border. These movements, coupled with diplomatic brinkmanship from Moscow, painted a foreboding picture of imminent escalation. The ramifications of this geopolitical chess game extend far beyond Ukraine's borders, casting a long shadow over neighbouring nations, including Serbia. As tensions escalate, the delicate balance of power in the region is being reshaped, with profound implications for Serbia's strategic calculus and diplomatic engagements, particularly in the context of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

Russia's demands to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), framed as a mission to "protect Russia and our people," underscore the high-stakes nature of the conflict and the complex web of alliances and rivalries at play. Against this backdrop, Serbia finds itself at a crossroads, navigating a precarious path between its aspirations for European Union (EU) membership

and the gravitational pull of Russian influence. The Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, long marred by persistent challenges and unresolved issues, now finds itself at the intersection of these shifting geopolitical tides. As Serbia grapples with the implications of the Ukrainian conflict, the dynamics of the dialogue are undergoing a subtle yet significant transformation. Due to early historical ties between Serbia and Russia, perhaps because of their shared religious beliefs in Orthodox Christianity and linguistic ties of these nations, Serbia continues to maintain Russia as an ally. The ambiguous motives of Serbia in the current conflict add to the confusion surrounding its stance, further muddying its position in the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue.

The evolving geopolitical landscape has profound implications for Serbia's recalibration of priorities in the dialogue. As the specter of Russian influence looms large, Serbia's strategic decisions are increasingly shaped by the interplay of regional dynamics and global power politics. The trajectory of the dialogue hinges on Serbia's ability to navigate this complex terrain, balancing the imperatives of EU integration with the demands of regional stability. Amidst these challenges, the prospect of a permanent United States (US) or United Kingdom (UK) military presence in Kosovo emerges as a potential game changer for the future.

Ukraine War Actors and Key Events

The Ukrainian conflict has far-reaching geopolitical consequences that extend to the Balkans, particularly influencing the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. As international focus shifts towards Eastern Europe, the strategic decisions and alliances formed in response to the Ukraine war significantly affect the dynamics of the Kosovo-Serbia negotiations. This section outlines the key actors and pivotal events of the Ukraine war, setting the stage for understanding how these developments reverberate in the ongoing dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia.

Membership Action Plan to Ukraine

In early April 2008, a NATO summit began with intense debate about extending a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Ukraine. In order to gain membership to NATO, countries must first have a MAP. Russian President Vladimir Putin makes his opposition to Ukrainian membership known to NATO leaders, at

one point allegedly telling President George W. Bush that Ukraine is “not even a real nation-state.”¹ NATO did not offer Ukraine a MAP. After promising to work toward a relationship with the European Union, President Yanukovych, who ran for president again and won in 2010, changes political direction and begins to orient Ukraine toward Russia. This, combined with the controversial arrest of political opponent Yulia Tymoshenko in May 2011, sparks widespread protests about perceived government corruption. There are protests across the country, centering on Maidan Square in Kyiv, that lasted three months. At least 130 people, primarily civilians are killed. Tymoshenko expressed: “Every bullet that killed those people was a bullet in the heart of all of us,” she said. “You have to remember their faces, you have to have their faces before your eyes and remember their sacrifices,”² she continued. Yanukovych then flees to Russia; the new leadership commits to orienting Ukraine toward the European Union.

Russian Annexation of Crimea

After the Euromaidan demonstrations that led to the resignation of Yanukovych in February 2014, Russia occupies Crimea, a peninsula in Ukraine where the majority of the population is Russian. Key locations on the peninsula are occupied by Russian forces, who are dressed in military clothes devoid of Russian insignias.³ The United Nations and the European Union denounce the annexation, which sparks international indignation. Putin then increases the number of troops stationed close to the Ukrainian border and writes a piece asserting that Russians and Ukrainians are “one people.” Tens of thousands of Russian troops are stationed at the borders by December, and Putin makes demands on NATO and the US. One of these demands, which the Biden administration denied, is that Ukraine never be allowed to join NATO.⁴ Under the leadership of individuals whom the Ukrainian government believed to be terrorists with Russian support, the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk declared their independence from the country in 2014.⁵ Putin acknowledged these regions as autonomous entities and dispatched troops to “keep the peace,” and shortly after he broke his ties with US and European countries.

Full-scale Invasion of Ukraine

On 24 February 2022, a few days after acknowledging the separatist regions,

Russia invaded Ukraine on a large scale. The invasion started in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine. Putin completed the annexation of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia, four areas of Ukraine, after the Kremlin organized “referendums” in that country, which the West rejected as fraudulent.⁶ The large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia marked a significant escalation in the conflict, leading to the annexation of multiple regions despite international condemnation. This aggressive move not only reshaped the geopolitical landscape of Eastern Europe but also had far-reaching implications for global alliances and regional stability. Understanding these developments is crucial as we explore how such geopolitical shifts influence the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and the broader dynamics of international relations.

Navigating Strategic Alliances: The Role of the EU and Russia in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue

The dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is significantly shaped by the broader geopolitical landscape, particularly by the influence of the European Union and Russia. As Serbia seeks to balance its aspirations of EU membership with its longstanding ties to Russia, the complexities of these international pressures become evident. The EU’s role as a facilitator in the dialogue and its economic and political leverage over Serbia stands in contrast to Russia’s strategic alliances and support for Serbia’s stance on Kosovo. This section explores how these dual pressures and global alliances impact Serbia’s position and actions within the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, highlighting the intricate interplay of international forces that shape the path towards normalization and integration. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for anticipating the potential outcomes and challenges that lie ahead in the negotiation process.

International Pressure From the EU

Since Serbia’s EU membership application in December 2009, joining the EU remains a key strategic goal for Serbia. It has been a candidate member of the EU since 2012, and had formally begun accession negotiations in January 2014. The European Union is Serbia’s main trading partner and largest financial aid provider. The EU is also the facilitator of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue, which started in March 2011. Since the Ohrid Agreement of 18 March 2023,

the “Implementation Annex to the Agreement on the Path to Normalisation of Relations between Kosovo and Serbia,” both countries have yet to begin implementation of their parts of the agreement. Serbia’s relations with Kosovo remain to be the main inhibitor for both countries’ accession to the EU.⁷

Aligning with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the EU is also a requirement for countries’ EU membership attainment. The EU’s foreign policies and restrictions against Russia have become especially relevant since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Serbia’s alignments with the CFSP have not been up to par with EU institutions’ and member states’ expectations but have shown to be pragmatic, although volatile. This seems to be mainly due to Serbia’s historical alliances with Russia and China. Serbia has shown an unwillingness to concede to EU foreign policies concerning its allies, Russia and China. In 2021, Serbia showed a 5 percent improvement rate in alignment with the EU CFSP, but showed a decrease in this alignment in 2022—from 64% to 45%—during which, Russia became a main actor in EU foreign policy declarations and restrictions.⁸

Serbia’s Diplomatic Balancing Act Amidst EU and Russian Pressures

Serbia’s strong alliance with Russia has heavily impacted its stance in the Ukrainian conflict, hence remaining the only country in Europe not to have sanctioned Russia. After the elections of 3 April 2022, President Vucic still refused to apply sanctions against Russia. The EU and some of its member states have asked Serbia to choose between Brussels and Moscow, namely between the EU and Russia, expecting Serbia’s alignments to shift toward the EU. However, shortly after the invasion of Ukraine, Serbia established a three-year gas deal with Russia, which President Vucic claimed to be an “extremely favorable” deal.⁹ Serbia’s deviation from the EU toward Russia is shown even prior to the start of the Ukraine war. The establishment of a “Russian-Serbian Humanitarian Center (RSHC)” in Nis in 2012,¹⁰ the annual participation in the joint military exercise with Russia and Belarus, the “Slavic Brotherhood” since 2015,¹¹ Serbia’s vote against the UN General Assembly resolution regarding the militarization of Crimea in 2020,¹² and then its reluctance in joining the sanctions against Russia, are all actions that were not viewed kindly by the European Commission. Aside from sanctions, Serbia is also the only country

in Europe, besides Turkey, which has not banned Russian planes from its territory.¹³ Not surprisingly, since February 2022, Air Serbia airline has doubled its flights with Moscow after the EU banned Moscow flights.¹⁴

With increased international pressure, Serbia has adopted EU sanctions¹⁵ against specific Ukrainian nationals who allegedly threatened Ukraine's national security, including former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich.¹⁶ On 18 March 2022, Serbia implemented the Decision on the Temporary Protection of Displaced Persons from Ukraine as support for all the immigrants from Ukraine due to the war. This decision imposed temporary protection of Ukrainian nationals and Ukrainian family members seeking asylum, and was to be enforced for one year starting on 18 March 2022.¹⁷ Serbia was also in favour of the resolution on "Humanitarian consequences of the aggression against Ukraine" in the UN General Assembly on 24 March 2022.¹⁸ Serbia's vote for suspending Russia's membership in the UN Human Rights Council in April 2022 also caused a lot of controversy amongst Serbs; conservative authorities said that President Vucic made a mistake, risking relations with Russia, Serbia's strategic ally concerning the issue with Kosovo.¹⁹ On 11 May 2022, Serbia put sanctions against Russia for the first time since 2014, aligning with the EU sanctions against Russian cyberattacks on Ukraine. Serbia's unclear motives and conflicting actions have created confusion about its stance on the Ukrainian conflict and its interests in EU membership.

Approximately one year into the conflict, Serbia initiated the sale of weapons to Ukraine, another move that seemed contradictory to its historical ties and strong alliance with Russia.²⁰ In analyzing this strategy, it becomes apparent that Serbia aligns closely with Russia's interests. While other nations sell weapons to Ukraine, Serbia's decision carries significance, as Russia can ensure a level of control and understanding about the type of weaponry involved. Simultaneously, the sale of weapons to Ukraine, despite being Serbia's strong ally, demonstrates a pragmatic approach to safeguarding its interests and maintaining leverage with both sides of the conflict. This act does not seem to worry Russia, as Serbia has signed an agreement to "consult" with Russia about diplomatic issues.²¹ Ukraine, despite Kosovo's imposed sanctions on Russia, has not yet recognized Kosovo as a state, emphasizing its respect for Serbian territorial integrity.²² This stance may also have contributed to Russia accepting Serbia's decision to sell weapons to Ukraine, particularly at a time when Kosovo's recognition from Ukraine is especially needed. A recognition

from Ukraine at this time would push the five EU non-recognizer countries, Spain, Slovakia, Romania, Greece and Cyprus, to follow Ukraine's decision.²³

Global Alliances

Despite Serbia's ambitions to join the EU, its interests in its ally, Russia, remain very prevalent, especially concerning Serbia's motives regarding the territorial integrity of Kosovo. Being one of five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia has the right to veto Kosovo's UN membership as an independent state. This alone is a strong enough reason for Serbia not to sever its ties to its strategic ally and hence why Serbia will not sanction against Russia. President Vucic continues to defend his actions and has said in an interview in Brussels that, "A true friend is recognized in moments of difficulty, it is in these moments that one shows one's true face."²⁴

Since the start of the Ukraine war, the dependence on Russian natural gas in Europe has decreased and European energy security has become a major concern. Serbia, as well, is heavily reliant on Russian and Chinese energy supplies. On the one hand, Russia exports its natural gas to Serbia at a reduced price and owns the Serbian national oil and gas company, "Naftna Industrija Srbije" (NIS), holding a total share of 56.15 percent. On the other hand, China, with its "Belt and Road Initiative" launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013,²⁵ has been investing in coal-fuelled power plants in the Western Balkans. It has also invested in a thermal power plant in Serbia and has announced, "large Chinese infrastructure projects in power generation and renewable energy in Serbia's mining and energy sector."²⁶ China's investments in fossil fuel power plants have brought criticism from the EU, as it goes against the EU's Green Deal²⁷ plans, including the Green Agenda for Serbia. On 15 November 2023, Serbia signed a gas-supply deal with Azerbaijan; such a deal is expected to decrease Serbia's dependence on Russian gas.²⁸ Trying to balance between Russia and China on the one hand and the various EU projects on the other has put Serbia in a difficult position.

Besides energy supplies, China has shown to be an important ally to Serbia by investing in other sectors, such as infrastructure and education. The Belt and Road Initiative has created important paths linking China and Europe and has opened up more opportunities for Chinese investments in transport and infrastructure in Serbia. This can also be connected to the "16+1" initiative

started in 2012, which has a main goal of cooperation between China and 16 Central and Eastern European countries, including Serbia.²⁹ Some of China's capital investments in Serbia include the Budapest-Belgrade-Skopje (BBSP) corridor, which connects the centre of China with Central Europe, both by land and sea. China has also started investing in Serbian higher education, focusing on academic cooperation and the diversification of universities. Serbia's relations with China serve as a useful link between the East and the West, which is why some scholars are naming Serbia the "Switzerland of the Balkans."³⁰

National Dynamics and Regional Considerations

The interplay of national dynamics and regional considerations is crucial in understanding Serbia's stance on the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. Serbian nationalistic sentiments and the influence of external powers significantly shape public discourse and political actions. Despite Serbia's complex relationship with Russia and the West, the domestic and regional security concerns that have emerged following the Ukrainian conflict have further heightened tensions in the Balkans. This section delves into the impact of Serbian nationalism, media influence, and regional security issues on the geopolitical landscape of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. The narratives and actions taken by Serbia and its leaders reflect the broader challenges and strategic decisions that define this complex and evolving dialogue.

Serbian Nationalistic Sentiments and Public Discourse

Despite Serbia's unwillingness to sanction Russia, Serbia showed its support to Ukraine in other ways. While Serbia expressed their support for Ukraine through government statements, other Balkan countries demonstrated their solidarity by taking to the streets and adorning their country with Ukrainian flags and colours. Serbia's vague diplomacy has allowed it to maintain positive relations with both Russia and Ukraine while navigating the geopolitical tensions in the region. However, Serbian media shows the impact of Russian influence on the Serbian population. Based on a poll done by the organization "New Third Way," 66 percent of Serbs blame the West for the war in Ukraine, while over 90 percent see Putin as the best global leader.³¹

According to an opinion poll by CRTA, which was done through telephone

interviews of the Serbian population on what Serbia's foreign policy would be, 10 percent voted that it should be focused only on Russia, 33 percent voted it should be focused on Russia, but keep good relations with the EU and the West, 36 percent voted it should be focused on the EU and the West, but keep good relations with Russia, and 8 percent believed it should only focus on the EU and the West.³² This shows how Serbia leans towards Russia, but seeks to maintain good relations with the West.

Several Serbian speakers have admitted the large-scale Russian influence over Serbians and Serbian media. Editor of the Serbian fact-checking organization, *Istinomer*, Milena Popović, stated that “the narrative became anti-Western and pro-Russian when the war in Ukraine started, and most of the mainstream media picked up on that sentiment”.³³ According to NATO, the main source of Russian influence over the Balkans is Serbia and, to some extent, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Public discourse is mainly based on narratives delivered by Russians that tend to weaken the influence of the EU and NATO.³⁴ Dimitrije Milić, program director of New Third Way, states that “when Russia is losing or having difficulty in domestic and geopolitics, that’s when propaganda covers all over the Balkans through Serbian media.”³⁵ A main concern is voiced by Nataša Ivanovski, foreign policy editor of the daily newspaper *Blic*, “Information from the Russian side is transmitted as facts, without verification, the Russian narrative is promoted, and the biggest problem is that there is no verified, neutral information.”³⁶

In the same opinion poll as mentioned above by CRTA, where they asked the population's opinion on what relationship should Serbia have with the armed conflict in Ukraine, 16 percent said Serbia should impose sanctions on Russia in order to harmonize its foreign policy with the EU, 15 percent did not have any answers, and 69 percent believed Serbia should keep a good relationship with Russia, even if that means giving up on the EU.³⁷ Again, this offers proof of how Serbia's relations with Russia align closer to Russia than those with the West, and that perhaps a political strategy for political relations with the West may be to not openly declare support for Russia.

Heightened Security Concerns in the Balkans

With the start of the Ukraine war in 2022, similar narratives have been presented by Russian President Putin and Serbian President Vucic, both justifying

their actions under the notion of “protecting my people.” Putin first used this phrase during the annexation of Crimea in 2014.³⁸ During the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, he stated, “We have been left with no other option but to protect Russia and our people. The situation requires decisive and immediate action. The people’s republics of Donbas turned to Russia with a request for help.”³⁹ In the Balkans, President Vucic has also not been quiet. When President Kurti invoked reciprocity a decade after the 2013 Brussels Agreement, stipulating that Kosovo Serbs would switch to using Kosovan car plates, Vucic stated that Serbia would intervene to “protect its own people” from the Kosovo government’s decision.⁴⁰ Vucic’s actions were seen soon enough. A pre-notice was taken by the British lawmaker and chair of the parliamentary Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Alicia Kearns, stating that weapons were being smuggled across the border through ambulances into Orthodox churches in Kosovo.⁴¹ In May 2023, influenced Kosovo Serbs boycotted municipal elections after three Kosovan Albanian mayors were elected to northern Serb-majority municipalities. Violence erupted after this incident, leaving twenty-five NATO peacekeepers injured.⁴² The situation was brought under control by Kosovo police and NATO peacekeepers, while President Vucic put the Serbian army on high alert near the Kosovo-Serbia border.⁴³ Tensions escalated even further, with the September 24, 2024, Banjska attack by Serb militants on the Kosovo police force, during which Kosovo police sergeant Afrim Bunjaku lost his life.⁴⁴ The international criminal police organization Interpol has issued an arrest warrant for Kosovo Serb businessman and politician Milan Radoicic and 18 others over their possible involvement in the attack. This shows the interconnectedness between malevolent groups and state actors seeking to destabilize the most fragile part of the Balkans, serving as Europe’s second front after Ukraine.⁴⁵

The Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue

The trajectory of the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia is intricately linked with ongoing geopolitical developments, particularly the war in Ukraine. Serbia’s aspirations to join the European Union shape its strategic decisions. If Russia emerges victorious in the ongoing conflict, Serbia may strategically balance between EU enlargement and Russian influence. Upon Serbia’s accession to the EU, potential challenges may arise for Kosovo’s integration into

the EU, given the complex relationship between the two entities. This scenario suggests that Serbia's stance within the EU may have a great impact on the dynamics of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. The ongoing dialogue process between Kosovo and Serbia is marked by persistent challenges, with Serbia's geopolitical position significantly shaping the course of these discussions. Understanding this context is crucial for anticipating the complexities that may arise throughout the negotiation process. Resolving Kosovo's position in the dialogue and its integration into international organizations remains complex.

Serbia's Current Position in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue

The Ukrainian conflict has impacted the EU and its approach regarding the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. Since the start of the war, the EU has been furthering its efforts to settle the Kosovo-Serbia issue. The Ohrid Agreement of 18 March 2023, hosted by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borell, was an attempt to normalize relations between the two countries.⁴⁶ Neither Serbia nor Kosovo have yet to start implementing the agreement, however. EU member states are pressuring Kosovo to establish the "Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities" and Serbia to "deliver on de-facto recognition."⁴⁷ Serbia's latest actions have also not shown any progress toward normalization. After the September attack on Banjska, President Vucic claimed that the attack was Prime Minister Kurti's fault for provoking ethnic Serbs in the north of Kosovo. Serbia has yet to condemn the attack, which has led to suspicions about whether Belgrade was actually behind the attack.⁴⁸ These events were not taken well by the EU and have not shown promises regarding any progress in the normalization between Kosovo and Serbia.

Kosovo's Current Position in the Kosovo-Serbia Dialogue

Kosovo's position in the dialogue is centred on achieving mutual recognition and securing its sovereignty. Kosovo has expressed its readiness to implement the Ohrid Agreement but insists that Serbia must fulfill its obligations, including recognizing Kosovo's independence and ceasing its interference in Kosovo's internal affairs. The government of Kosovo views the establishment of the "Association of Serb-Majority Municipalities" as a complex issue that must align with its constitutional framework and not undermine its sovereignty.

Kosovo's Prime Minister Albin Kurti has called for the EU and other international actors to exert more pressure on Serbia to commit to the normalization process.⁴⁹ Kosovo has also highlighted the need for enhanced security measures and international support, particularly in light of violent incidents such as the attack on Banjska. The government asserts that these events demonstrate Serbia's destabilizing role and the importance of a stronger NATO and EU presence in the region to safeguard peace and stability.

Kosovo remains steadfast in its aspiration to join international organizations, including the EU and NATO.⁵⁰ It considers these integrations essential for long-term stability and development. Additionally, Kosovo has urged the international community to recognize its efforts in promoting democracy and human rights, emphasizing its commitment to constructive dialogue despite challenges.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the armed conflict in Ukraine impacts nations at a distance from the conflict zone, including Serbia's diplomatic approach towards the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. Serbia's historical ties with Russia, which has roots in their shared Slavic culture and shared religion, to this day continue to influence its strategic decisions, although Serbia aspires to gain EU membership. Serbia finds difficulties in navigating between EU alignment and Russia's influence. However, Serbia displays a pragmatic approach with its recent actions, such as sanctioning specific Ukrainian nationals and temporarily protecting displaced people from Ukraine, while at the same time refusing to implement sanctions against Russia.

The recent violence in Northern Kosovo shows heightened security concerns in the Balkans, and emphasizes Serbia's complexities in the diplomatic landscape. Amidst these challenges, recommending a permanent US military base as a presence in Kosovo provides a potential solution to regional stability, based on existing US military bases worldwide.

Understanding these complex dynamics in the Balkans is essential for policymakers and diplomats who seek to navigate the difficulties of the Kosovo-Serbia dialogue and the security concerns in the Western Balkans. By analyzing Serbia's approach and responses to geopolitical shifts, alliances, and political decisions, valuable insights are gained about the factors that influence diplomatic relations and regional stability in the Western Balkans.

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The New Age Space Race: Why “World” Peace Is Not Enough

Nicholas Dominique

This chapter will delve into the history of space exploration and the lessons learned from the past, especially those related to Cold War tensions and how those lessons can be applied to modern times. After the initial enthusiasm over the “Space Race” waned, many countries did not see any value in space exploration. This is why it has been over 50 years since a human set foot on the moon. Fast forward to today, and global interest in space is making a comeback. Commercial companies are now launching satellites at an unprecedented pace. Several countries have dedicated military personnel and weapons to defend their interests in space, and some are even contemplating aggressive actions such as anti-satellite and nuclear electromagnetic pulse weapons. All of this is happening while government agencies are preparing to send manned missions back to the moon in what could be overlapping areas of interest. What happens soon will determine if space will be a peaceful domain or the next war zone.

Weaponization and Militarization of Space

Cold War ASAT

The beginning of anti-satellite (ASAT) testing was, to no surprise, a direct response to the first satellite. In October of 1957, the Soviet Union became

the first to successfully place a satellite in orbit known as “Sputnik I.” This is widely known as the start of the Space Race between the United States and the Soviet Union.¹ In response, not only did the United States launch their own satellite just a few months later, but they began working on what is regarded as the first anti-satellite testing in the program known as *Bold Orion*.² This program was relatively different than today’s anti-satellite capabilities, as it was launched from a B-47 airplane. In total, twelve Bold Orion missiles were launched. In the final test, the missile flew within four miles of Explorer VI which was an extreme achievement at the time. These tests proved that a ballistic missile could intercept a satellite in orbit.

In response to this, the Soviet Union began working on their own anti-satellite capabilities in the 1960s and ’70s. They developed what is known as a “co-orbital,” where a satellite matches its target’s orbit and detonates alongside it.³ The final noteworthy anti-satellite test of the Cold War was the United States’ ASM-135 missile. This missile was air-launched, a method similar to the Bold Orion. It destroyed a cold United States satellite by locking in on its infrared image using a telescopic seeker.⁴ During the Cold War, we saw some of the most rapidly advancing developments in anti-satellite testing due to the increased importance of surveillance satellites and the fear of other countries putting weapons in space. Having the assurance of the ability to destroy said capabilities was vastly important to both nations, hence the rapid development of the space industry.

Modern Age ASAT

After the Cold War, there was a lapse in the development of anti-satellite weapons. This was until China shocked the space community in 2007 by launching their own anti-satellite weapon and destroying one of their old weather satellites. It utilized a missile that collided with the satellite, causing more than 3,000 pieces of space debris to go into orbit. This missile did not have any explosives but collided with the satellite with enough force to destroy it.⁵ Many countries condemned this, including the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, citing the hazard that the debris will cause in orbit. Due to the explosion being at a higher altitude, it will cause the space debris to stay in orbit much longer than in previous tests. A detailed analysis shows that 100 years after the explosion, 79 percent of trackable debris will still be in orbit.⁶

Less than a year later, the United States demonstrated their own anti-satellite capabilities for the first time since 1985 in what is known as *Operation Burnt Frost*. They shot down a satellite that they claimed would be a threat to human life due to hazardous propellant if it were to deorbit.⁷ However, Russia claimed that the propellant would have caused no damage as similar satellites have not had any issue burning up in re-entry, and that the United States did this in response to the Chinese test a year earlier.⁸

Within the past decade, there have been two more major ASAT tests of note. In 2019, India launched what is known as “Mission Shakti,” a kinetic-kill ASAT similar to the one used in China’s 2007 test. But unlike China’s test, India’s was 800 kilometres lower and had a downward trajectory. This suggests that they were trying to minimize the life of the resulting debris. As a result, the test had 400 pieces of debris that may have been burned up in mere weeks.⁹ Even though the test was frowned upon, many in the scientific community noted that it did not compare to the damage of the Chinese ASAT test.¹⁰ Just two years later, Russia had tested their anti-satellite capabilities in a much more destructive way. Their direct ascent test caused more than 1,500 pieces of trackable debris that could last in space for decades.¹¹

The development of anti-satellite capabilities has caused the spread of much debris in low earth orbit. Not only are the thousands of registered pieces of debris mentioned above, but pieces that are too small to be measured (under 10 cm) could be up in the tens to hundreds of thousands because of these tests. Even though these pieces are as small as paint chips, they are in orbit and moving very fast. Just one of these microscopic pieces can put a satellite out of commission. From 1999 through 2022, the International Space Station has had to alter course 32 times to avoid space debris.¹² With the addition of China’s Tiangong Space Station, there are lives at risk due to the result of Low-Earth Orbit anti-satellite testing.

In April of 2022, the United States became the first space-faring nation to self-impose a ban on anti-satellite testing. Many countries followed suit after this, including Canada, Japan, Germany, South Korea and the United Kingdom.¹³ Towards the end of the year, the United Nations General Assembly approved an ASAT test ban resolution, with 155 nations in favour, nine abstaining and nine voting against it. Of the four countries that have conducted these tests, the United States was the only one in favour as China and Russia voted against the resolution and India abstained. Some countries that did not vote in favour,

such as Syria, mentioned that the United States had an advantage over other nations because they have already achieved ASAT capabilities and completed their testing.¹⁴ With this new ASAT ban resolution, they believed it would limit the progress of other nations who wanted to develop such capabilities.

Russia submitted a document in response to this resolution, highlighting their desire to ban all weapons in space and specifically cited the 1967 Outer Space Treaty. This was one of five Space Laws that has been ratified by the UN—and the most used. After their ASAT test of 2021, Russia even cited it in their defense claiming they did not violate any space laws while doing this since the treaty does not explicitly ban the use of direct ascent ASATs. Article IX of this treaty states that countries “shall conduct all their activities in outer space, including the moon and other celestial bodies, with due regard to the corresponding interests of all other States Parties to the Treaty.” There could be an argument that this means to limit the debris caused, but because all ASAT tests have been on the country’s own satellites it is hard to bring this article to action.¹⁵

Nuclear in Space

ASAT weapons are not the only testing that has caused significant damage to the space environment. The United States and Soviet Union both conducted high altitude nuclear testing in the 1960s, with the most significant being the United States’ *Starfish Prime*. This was a nuclear test detonated at an altitude of 400 km, the highest nuclear detonation in history. This test resulted in more than a dozen satellites having severe radiation damage which even included a satellite that was launched a day after the test was conducted.¹⁶ Due to the massive damage caused, the next year the United States, United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union ratified the *Limited Test Ban Treaty*. This prohibited nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere and outer space. When the outer space treaty was ratified by the United Nations in 1967, Article IV states that “Parties to the Treaty undertake not to place in orbit around the earth any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction, install such weapons on celestial bodies, or station such weapons in outer space in any other manner.”¹⁷

The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 was created in large part due to concerns of using nuclear weapons in space, as an expanded version of the Limited Test

Ban Treaty. It not only had Article IV which banned the use of nuclear weapons in space but sets the principle that space is no country to claim and should be explored peacefully and for scientific purposes. This is also such an important doctrine due to the fact it is one of very few space doctrines that are signed by all major spacefaring nations.

In February 2024, White House spokesman John Kirby warned of a national security threat of a “space-based, anti-satellite capability that has not yet been deployed.” Some sources claimed that this related to Russia wanting to put nuclear weapons into space.¹⁸ Russia’s Deputy Foreign Minister claimed this was a “malicious fabrication.”¹⁹ If this were true, it would be in clear violation of Article IV of the Outer Space treaty by having a nuclear weapon in orbit. If a nuclear warhead were to be detonated in Low-Earth orbit, the results would be catastrophic. Seeing that the number of satellites we have in orbit has skyrocketed, mainly due to private companies like SpaceX, a nuclear explosion could cause thousands of satellites to malfunction. In 1962, at the time of Starfish Prime there were a few dozen satellites in orbit and many of them were affected to some degree. Today, of the over 10,000 satellites in orbit, over 5,000 are in Low-Earth orbit.

Space Forces

The United States is heavily dependent on satellites, especially in a military sense. This was one of the primary reasons for creating the United States Space Force in late 2019. The United States military is heavily dependent on their satellites for capabilities, such as communication, navigation, and intelligence. China’s military strategists have already recognized this and identified this as a potential “Achilles’ Heel.”²⁰ America’s dependence on satellites makes sense as to why the Space Force was established as the first separate service branch in over 70 years.

The idea of a separate branch to protect assets in space was not a new idea, with the first separate space branch being the Russian Space Forces established in 1992. After being dissolved twice, they have been active once again since 2015 as a sub-branch of the Russian Aerospace Forces. Later in 2015, China announced sweeping reform to their military, the People’s Liberation Army. As a part of this, they created a new branch known as the Strategic Support Force. The function of this branch was dominance in the space, cyber,

and electromagnetic domains.²¹ Their Space Systems Department oversees all space launch bases.

For the United States, the Rumsfeld Commission recommended to the United States a separate service branch for space as early as 2001. However, after the September 11 attacks, the military shifted focus into the Global War on Terror. The United States Space Force was established almost 20 years later. There were people working in the space field under the United States Air Force, and those people were subsequently shifted into the Space Force. Additionally, many close allies to the United States added a space component to their military in the years to follow, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom. These countries make up what is known as the Five Eyes Intelligence Alliance.²²

How This Is Shaping World Order and Peace

A long history of ASAT testing has already done a great deal of damage to the Low Earth orbit area, causing an irreversible amount of debris that will affect orbits for decades to come. The United Nations General Assembly resolution to halt direct-ascent ASAT weapon testing was a big step in the right direction. Direct ascent was used in both China and Russia's ASAT testing which were the cause of large amounts of debris in orbit, but this resolution does not place any restrictions on other types of ASAT tests. This implies that ASAT tests that do not cause large debris may still be tested and possibly used. It is also concerning that three of the four countries that have demonstrated direct-ascent ASAT capabilities did not sign onto this resolution. From a military perspective, there is not much that the United Nations (UN) can do to deter countries from conducting these destructive tests. As of 2019 the North American Treaty Organization (NATO) declared space as an operational domain and adopted a Space Policy in order to provide clarity to all its members. The policy discusses that NATO members will be in line with international law, as well as establishing a NATO Space Centre. Perhaps the biggest statement from NATO when it came to space was during the Brussels Summit of 2021. NATO leaders stated that "attacks to, from, or within space present a clear challenge to the security of the Alliance, the impact of which could threaten national and Euro-Atlantic prosperity, security, and stability, and could be as harmful to modern societies as a conventional attack. Such attacks could lead to the invocation of Article

5. A decision as to when such attacks would lead to the invocation of Article 5 would be taken by the North Atlantic Council on a case-by-case basis.”²³ This is extremely significant as Article 5 states that “[i]f a NATO Ally is a victim of an armed attack, each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked.”²⁴ This statement is the biggest deterrence to date when it comes to the use of ASAT weapons against another country as it could lead to NATO having a military response. No country has yet to use an ASAT weapon against a satellite of another nation, but having this provides great deterrence for any nation to try such a thing.

Space Exploration

Return to the Moon

“We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.” Former US President John F. Kennedy spoke these famous words a little over 60 years ago in 1962. His prediction was correct, as Neil Armstrong would become the first man on the moon in 1969 during NASA’s Apollo program. However, something he could not have predicted was the politics that would come into play after this achievement. As soon as public interest waned after the moon landing, NASA’s budget was sliced to the point where the Apollo program was cancelled prematurely. In 1966 NASA made up 4.41 percent of the United States federal budget. This dropped to less than 1 percent just 10 years later.²⁵

NASA’s budget for space exploration would only get worse as time continued. In 2004 President George W. Bush announced plans for NASA to not only go back to the Moon by 2020, but to start developing technology for a manned Mars mission in 2030 in a program known as *Constellation*. Sadly, it was cancelled just seven years later following a recurring theme of space exploration programs getting cancelled before they can even get off the ground.²⁶

NASA’s newest space exploration program, Artemis, has already shown some promising signs but also face the same political issues as Constellation.²⁷ Started in 2017, it was able to use some important components from Constellation such as the Orion capsule, which was supposed to be used to land men on

the moon. The plan was once again to get men back on the moon with multiple unmanned missions and three Artemis missions, two of which are crewed. Artemis I, an unmanned mission to test the new Space Launch System rocket and Orion spacecraft was completed in 2022 after the spacecraft completed an orbit around the Moon. The crew for Artemis II has already been announced and is projected to launch in late 2025 after facing delays. In Artemis III, NASA plans for boots on the moon with the goal of developing a lunar base for research.²⁸

Race to Shackleton Crater

The United States is not the only country with lunar ambitions. China has also voiced that they plan to send astronauts to the moon with the goal of establishing a permanent lunar base for research. Both the United States and China mention the same location for a potential landing site at Shackleton Crater in the Moon's South Pole.²⁹ The main reason for this location selection is the deposits of ice that have been identified in this area. Ice is a resource that can be used to provide oxygen for the astronauts to breathe through electrolysis, drinking water, and even rocket fuel. Having these resources available and ready on the moon's surface instead of having to bring it from Earth provides a huge advantage.³⁰ Both the United States and China have been developing their allies for this future endeavour, as China announced an alliance with Russia in their lunar base and named the project the "International Lunar Research Station," (ILRS) and opened it to any other countries willing to participate.³¹

The race to Shackleton crater may be a space race similar to that of the United States and Soviet Union in the 1960s. According to Article II of the Outer Space Treaty, no country can lay claim to any part of space or celestial bodies. This could cause the Artemis and ILRS programs to be competing for the same resources in the same part of the moon. Once again, the vagueness of the Outer Space treaty may cause potential issues.

The United States has announced what is known as the Artemis Accords, which are non-binding bilateral agreements supposed to be a more up-to-date set of rules for conduct in space. To date, 35 countries have signed on. This does not include Russia and China due to the claim the accords are too "U.S.-centric" and the likeliness of the countries signing on is "most likely none." The bulk of the Accords is reaffirming countries' commitment to the Outer Space Treaty, as well as providing clarification and tackling new issues such as the

collection of space resources.³² It also lays the groundwork for transparency between countries with new discoveries, preserving historical sites of significance and pacing the use of natural resources on other celestial bodies.

Private Companies

One of the big reasons for the latest space boom is the development of private companies. This has allowed for the rapid advancement of space technology such as SpaceX's reusable rockets. Having the ability to reuse rockets has allowed them to not only save a lot of money when it comes to launches, but also put satellites into orbit like never seen before. They set a record of 96 successful launches and are aiming to do as many as 144 this year. Their Star Link satellites account for more than half of the satellites presently in orbit.

Under the Outer Space Treaty, every launch is the responsibility of the rocket's country of origin. Therefore, every launch by private companies, such as SpaceX, falls under the responsibility of the United States government. With growing interest in lunar and asteroid mining, not much seems to stand in the way of private companies and the potential \$100 billion market of the moon.³³

How This Is Shaping World Order/Peace

The seeming development of a rivalry between the United States' Artemis Accords and China's ILRS may hinder our hope for the peaceful and cooperative exploration of outer space. Due to the lack of an updated Space Law from the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), countries are starting to take it into their own hands and write laws in their own personal interest. An example of this is the Space Resource Exploration and Utilization Act of 2015, where private companies in the United States lobbied to legalize lunar mining. The UNOOSA has not ratified any new laws since 1984, and since then a lot of new developments and technology has been implemented. A new version of the Outer Space Treaty is long overdue, providing clarifications to the previous one as well as new guidelines for upcoming issues that could happen between competing countries. These clarifications should include the difference between "bases" and "claims" and how countries would go about establishing a permanent presence. Private company restrictions on lunar mining should be included, possibly having studies done about the impact it would

have not only on the moon but also Earth if we were able to harness resources, and to make sure these companies are kept in check if they are able to gather resources. The Artemis Accords are the closest we have had to an updated treaty; however, as a non-binding arrangement it does not carry as much weight, especially due to the absence of China and Russia from this agreement that are projected to have a base on the moon within the next decade. If we are to truly utilize space for peaceful, scientific purposes, these are steps that would help a great deal.

Conclusion

As we enter this vastly changing landscape in the space domain, it is important to remember how we got here to take the necessary steps to ensure a safe and responsible future. The last use of nuclear weapons was able to be banned due to countries collaborating for the good of peace in space, and the good of humanity. It is important we continue to work together to make and agree on doctrine that will ensure space not as a terrain to be capitalized on for profit, but to learn more about our universe. This is a crucial time to set this important precedent, with the space industry booming within the last decade and continuing to skyrocket in importance.

We use space in our everyday lives whether we know it or not. Our phones are dependent on satellites to make calls, use GPS, etc. If our space capabilities were lost, even for one day, it would be catastrophic and affect almost everyone on this planet. If we want to be able to use these assets, it is crucial that we promote safe and cooperative practices in space when it comes not only to the satellites in orbit, but also to space exploration. This means that large international institutions need to be proactive in creating guidelines that will secure a peaceful space domain in which all of mankind can cooperate for scientific purposes. If our conflicts on earth expand into the space domain, it will be catastrophic for all of humanity. It is our responsibility to ensure that this “New Age Space Race” benefits humanity instead of harming it.

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Quo Vadis? The United Nations and Peace Operations

Howard G. Coombs

Our most serious shortcoming—and here I refer to the entire international community—is our inability to prevent crises. The United Nations was born from war. Today, we must be here for peace.¹—United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres (12 December 2016)

“In the Service of Peace”²

Within these words, Guterres encapsulates the *raison d’être* for the United Nations—to serve the cause of international peace and security. This mission is not just essential; it is the cornerstone of the United Nations’ existence. Despite its best efforts, the United Nations faces significant and complex challenges in preventing, mitigating, or resolving conflict. The road to peace is not easy, but the United Nations, as a recognized international arbiter, continues to strive for it in myriad forms, including multidimensional peace operations.³

Modern peace operations are not strictly the purview of the United Nations; nevertheless, due to their role “in the service of peace,” United Nations forces or supported organizations play a large part in preventing the outbreak of conflict, stopping hostilities, and alleviating the impact of disaster or violence in war-torn areas. This chapter suggests that while the late twentieth and early twenty-first United Nations peace operations have been problematic, taken as

a whole, the United Nations remains a global leader in peace activities and, through re-examining the conduct of its peace activities, has great potential to aid in resolving conflict in a troubled century, offering a beacon of hope in these challenging times.

Peace Operations: Composition and Context

Peace operations initiated by the United Nations encompass various activities, from proactive deployments to prevent crises to fostering societal resilience against natural and man-made disasters. This diversity underscores the complexity of modern peace operations and the need for tailored approaches to each conflict situation.⁴ Such operations also include humanitarian assistance in the wake of disasters. Of course, there are traditional peacekeeping missions to arbitrate and monitor negotiated peace and peace enforcement missions to cease armed violence. The violent potential of these activities runs from low in the case of peacebuilding to high for peace enforcement. These missions are often multidimensional and involve the United Nations and other military, police, and civilian organizations.⁵

Following this, it is necessary to acknowledge that multidimensional peace operations⁶ are inherently complex and conducted in a highly complicated operational environment. One conceptual tool that has arisen to delineate the contemporary security setting is the idea of “grey zone conflict,” also known as “subthreshold conflict.” The grey zone, like most of an iceberg, is underwater and not visible from the surface. The grey zone is not transparent to observers. While lacking clarity, most definitions of grey zone conflict share three main principles. First, grey zone activities are tailored to avoid creating a response involving military force. Second, these adversarial actions are opaque, causing difficulty in recognizing and interpreting what transpired. Last, the use of technology is maximized to target specific audiences and create a maximum effect.⁷ Through its multidimensional peace operations involving military and civilian agencies, the United Nations can play a significant role in addressing the challenges posed by the grey zone, particularly in situations where military force alone is not the appropriate response.⁸ For example, at the 2024 Kingston Consortium on International Security Conference, Tomass Pildegovičs, security and resilience advisor to the Latvian foreign minister, stated that Rus-

sian disinformation is one of the most insidious threats to national resilience.⁹ This disintegrating influence cannot be effectively dealt with through military means. Also, when considering the grey zone idea, one needs to acknowledge that the primary conflict modalities can be broadly described as (1) Peace, (2) War, and (3) Not Peace–Not War, with grey zone activities contained within the latter.

Furthermore, the grey zone model is often part of another related and overarching concept—“hybrid warfare.” Like grey zone conflict, hybrid warfare can have nuances depending on the user’s perspective. Despite that, at its most basic, twenty-first century hybrid conflict combines conventional and unconventional approaches throughout all domains of conflict. These domains include aspects of all instruments of national power: diplomatic, informational, economic, and military.¹⁰ These practices collectively create a highly complex and fragmented security environment that necessitates a thorough understanding before embarking on peace operations. This understanding is crucial for achieving meaningful peace agreements and devising effective strategies for each conflict situation.¹¹

One need look no further than the current conflict in Ukraine, which began with Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014 and has since evolved into a complex war involving both conventional and unconventional tactics. This conflict presents not only traditional war challenges but also hybrid and grey zone aspects—all within the context of worsening global violence. In United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres’ 2023 remarks to the Security Council, he stressed the importance of collaborative efforts to address these threats:

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, in clear violation of the United Nations Charter and international law, is aggravating geopolitical tensions and divisions, threatening regional stability, increasing the nuclear threat, and creating deep fissures in our increasingly multipolar world. All this comes when cooperation and compromise for multilateral solutions are needed more than ever to tackle challenges from the climate crisis to unprecedented levels of inequality to disruptive technologies.¹²

Despite Guterres’ sentiments, institutional paralysis, such as Russia’s veto of all Security Council resolutions concerning Ukraine since 2022, creates a complicated situation. It not only makes it difficult for the United Nations to act, but also dampens much-needed international cooperation.¹³

Peace Operations: Challenges

Alongside the complexities of the security environment and the Security Council's inability to act, United Nations peace operations have had to address problems related to mission conduct and peacekeeper behaviour. The 1990s were particularly problematic, with significant failures in Africa and Europe. These crises in the United Nations led to peace operations that generated much introspection and study. This reflection resulted in a revitalized approach and structure to United Nations peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building activities.¹⁴ Despite hard work, many ongoing obstacles remain. These challenges encompass the need for force protection, lack of local support for peace initiatives, insufficient resourcing, poor peacekeeper conduct, and difficulties in coordination and integration within the multitude of actors involved in peace operations.

Despite the acknowledgement that United Nations peacekeepers are supporting or enforcing international mandates, they continue to face significant security risks in volatile environments, including attacks by armed groups, asymmetric threats, and hostile local populations. Ensuring the safety and security of personnel is a constant challenge for United Nations missions.¹⁵ Recent attacks by Israel on members of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) highlight this continuing threat to United Nations personnel and difficulties with operating in the Middle East.¹⁶

The success of peace operations also depends heavily on political will and cooperation from conflicting parties. However, political obstacles, such as a lack of commitment to peace processes, spoilers undermining negotiations, and diplomatic deadlocks, can impede progress.¹⁷ In Mali, government backing for the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), which commenced in 2013, weakened following a military coup in 2020. In 2022, the mission's mandate was delayed due to disputes over its operational freedoms and how to tackle reports of escalating human rights violations by the Malian armed forces. Frictions with the new Malian government continued until 2023, when the mission was not renewed. During this 2022–2023 timeframe, United Nations peacekeepers in Mali operated in a challenging political environment that exceeded the scope of their mandate, offering limited benefits to civilians while facing considerable dangers.¹⁸

In addition to the previously mentioned obstacles, the need for transparent

and professional peacekeeper conduct is critical. Instances of misconduct by peacekeeping personnel, particularly sexual exploitation and abuse, have tarnished the reputation of United Nations missions and undermined local trust. High standards of conduct and accountability are essential to maintaining credibility and legitimacy.¹⁹ In 2007, the United Nations was forced to remove more than 100 Sri Lankan peacekeepers from the peacekeeping mission in Haiti following accusations of sexual exploitation and harassment—and then address the damage to the United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) created by these actions.²⁰

These challenges can be further exacerbated by the fact that United Nations peacekeeping operations often suffer from insufficient funding, equipment shortages, and logistical challenges. These limitations limit their capacity to implement mandates effectively and respond to evolving security threats.²¹ The United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) operated from 2007 to 2020 and faced chronic funding issues, equipment shortages, and logistical challenges. These issues and imperfect mission structural arrangements led to its demise.²² This also, in turn, speaks to a need for effective collaboration.

Effective coordination and integration among various actors involved in peace operations, including military, civilian, and humanitarian components, is often challenging. Ensuring this comprehensive approach and establishing coherence and synergy across different aspects of intervention remains a persistent issue.²³ For example, along with the United Nations, another international organization dedicated to providing peace and security to its members is the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). While NATO is a military alliance focused on collective defence, it can effectively collaborate with the United Nations.

To offer one an idea of the conflict space where NATO conducts its operations, one can visualize ideas of deterrence and defence as analogous to peacekeeping and peace enforcement ideas. These are applied to regional crisis management to prevent the spread of war and alleviate suffering. Admittedly for NATO, one could argue more so the former than the latter. Because of that, within peace operations, parallel organizations, like NATO, might be more productive when dealing with state versus non-state actors, allowing, for example, the United Nations to prioritize its activities to mitigate violence by non-state actors against civilians.²⁴ The United Nations sometimes works with

or through NATO to establish and maintain secure environments. The most well-known forms of cooperation have been United Nations Security Council Resolutions, which provided the mandates for NATO operations in the Western Balkans, Afghanistan, and Libya and the NATO training mission in Iraq.²⁵

Understanding the roles of NATO and supporting actors within the broad realm of peace operations will allow for an evaluation of the possibilities that multidimensional United Nations-supported peace operations hold in an increasingly fractured international security setting. This is despite the structural barriers of the United Nations created by the previously mentioned veto powers of members of the United Nations Security Council.²⁶

Addressing these disintegrating factors helps create *legitimacy* for these peace efforts. This legitimacy in the eyes of the host nation, amongst one's forces, with other implementing partners and, indeed, the remainder of the world is critical to achieving mission success. Legitimacy is often a distinguishing contributor to the success or failure of a peace operation.²⁷ That characteristic is vital to the success of such efforts to create peace, not just at the tactical level but also within the operational and strategic realms.

The United Nations is the only organization that can consistently generate international legitimacy for its missions. Scholars like political scientist Sarah B. K. von Billerbeck argue that one must view the concept of legitimacy as multidimensional, having many strategic and operational nuances. Von Billerbeck suggests that the United Nations needs to view the idea of legitimacy as both an "operational actor that participates concretely in stabilization and peace consolidation, deploying troops, materials, and resources to war-torn countries, and a normative actor that embodies and projects norms and principles at the international level."²⁸ This more nuanced model fits well with the needs of modern peace operations, which must simultaneously deal with the ethereal concerns of strategy and the tangible demands of operations. In any case, legitimacy must be defined, shared, and protected during peace operations to aid success. Understanding and addressing these challenges can help maintain and defend the necessary legitimacy.

Peace Operations: Roles and Outcomes

Notwithstanding United Nations peace operations' complexities, even with the current frictions in the Security Council, they present opportunities for the

global community to unite to encourage and establish peace. While pessimists might argue that peace is the absence of war and that war has been continuous throughout human prehistory and history, others, like peace researcher Antony Adolf, say that peace has a long and established legacy at the individual, societal, and transnational levels, with peace practices adapting and evolving to produce “one world, many peaces.”²⁹ Considering an oft-divided United Nations Security Council on Indo-Pacific, Middle East, and Eastern Europe issues, this approach may sometimes be one peace at a time, supported by international cooperation, in activities like those imbued within peace operations. The International Crisis Group, a well-respected conflict studies think tank, observes: “The organization [United Nations] needs to look for ways to sustain and strengthen these efforts despite the dispiriting geopolitical circumstances.”³⁰

Multidimensional United Nations peace operations can be crucial in preventing conflicts from escalating into full-scale wars or in lessening their effects. First, they can deploy peacekeeping representatives and forces to conflict-prone regions, helping to deter violence and facilitate dialogue among conflicting parties and thus bring peaceful outcomes.³¹ For example, this was accomplished by the United Nations Preventive Deployment Force in Macedonia (December 1992 to February 1999), which successfully prevented the Yugoslav conflict from spilling over into Macedonia.³²

Second, beyond traditional peacekeeping, modern United Nations missions often involve broader mandates encompassing peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction. Though with challenges, this presents an opportunity to address the root causes of conflict, rebuild institutions, and promote sustainable development.³³ The United Nations Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS), started in 2011, has been consistently renewed to encompass four key areas: protecting civilians, facilitating conditions for humanitarian aid delivery, supporting the implementation of the peace agreement and related processes, and monitoring, investigating, and reporting on breaches of humanitarian and human rights laws. UNMISS has collaborated with humanitarian partners, national and local authorities, security forces, and the displaced community. The evolving political and security setting is allowing the Mission to extend its support to more people in need while strengthening the capacity of local police and the justice system to safeguard their citizens.³⁴

Third, protecting civilians caught in conflict zones is a central mandate of

many modern United Nations peace operations. Peacekeepers can mitigate violence's impact on vulnerable populations by providing a physical presence and humanitarian assistance.³⁵ The Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies pour la stabilisation en République démocratique du Congo (MONUSCO), was started in 2010 as the successor mission to MONUC or Mission de l'Organisation des Nations unies en République démocratique du Congo. MONUSCO's primary goals are to protect civilians and promote the stability and development of state institutions in the Democratic Republic of Congo, while also advancing governance and security reforms. Progress has been made in these areas.³⁶

Fourth, the United Nations increasingly collaborates with regional organizations and coalitions in peacekeeping efforts. Leveraging regional expertise and resources can enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of interventions.³⁷ Established in 2011, the United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) lend assistance to the Libyan authorities. It collaborates with other interested parties and provides expertise in "political affairs, human rights, transitional justice, mine action, demobilization, development, women's empowerment, public information, and communication."³⁸ Since 2021, however, political divisions and violence have undermined societal stability. The mission continues to try to resolve this impasse.³⁹

Fifth, United Nations missions often support efforts to promote human rights, strengthen rule of law institutions, and foster accountability for human rights abuses. This contributes to long-term stability and justice in conflict-affected societies.⁴⁰ Since 1999, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) has worked with NATO to support enhancing the rule of law, civil administration, democratization and capacity building, and reconstruction and economic development.⁴¹

While there have been setbacks for every success, along with ongoing conflicts and failures in Africa, Southwest Asia, the Middle East, and Eastern Europe, one needs to recognize that when seized, with the right conditions, multidimensional peace operations can present opportunities that help create resilient societies capable of withstanding "major shocks" like disasters, violence, or even subthreshold conflict, like the grey zone. This potential for resilience is a beacon of hope in the often-turbulent world of peace operations.

Regarding the latter, Norwegian peace and conflict researcher Gunhild Gjorv explains that within the range of grey zone activities, crises of vari-

ous types can arise during the early phases of insecurity. These subthreshold actions occur before the commencement of intentional oppositional activities that may lead to conflict. It needs to be recognized that adversarial endeavours during the war, or “above-threshold conflict,” can create a much greater degree of enduring instability and are higher on the “continuum of social insecurity” as the greater levels of violence create more extreme societal effects, leading to socio-political rupture and risk. However, until the emergence of deliberate antagonistic actions that might provoke an armed response, much that transpires along the lower part of the continuum of insecurity within the grey zone represents activities that are non-military and, if aggressive, remain below the threshold of overt conflict. Russia’s 2014 takeover of Crimea and the aggression in Ukraine until the invasion of 2022, all below the level of war, are examples of grey zone conflict. Consequently, Gjørnv concludes that preparing for and reacting to this complicated grouping of threats at the lower end of the continuum of insecurity requires a high degree of civil and military coordination from various actors. This comprehensive coordination is an arena in which the military and non-military parts of the United Nations can play a vital role. When combining this means of addressing instability in the setting of the recent Covid-19 epidemic and other crises, along with the harmful nature of grey zone activities, one is left considering a United Nations-led comprehensive approach, orchestrating non-military and military elements to deal with this broader range of threats holistically. Gjørnv focuses on increasing societal resilience. It creates an informed citizenry that is better equipped to deal with “major shocks” thanks to the awareness raised by education and information.⁴²

Peace Operations: Key Deductions and Inferences

The implications of this exploration of peace operations lead to some deductions and inferences about creating and supporting peace operations’ legitimacy to encourage resilient societies. These deductions address the operational and strategic issues that should be considered when facilitating the opportunities that United Nations peace operations can create. In other words, to paraphrase Adolf, the United Nations has great potential to make a mosaic of peace.

First, *clarity* is required in understanding the operational environment. This is necessary to comprehend the type of peace operation needed, its mandate and its composition. Without such an understanding and integrated strategy

capable of addressing the root causes of violence, it will not be possible. The 1990s provided many examples of failed or suboptimal missions resulting from a rapidly changing post-Cold War security environment. The lessons of Angola, Somalia, Rwanda, and Bosnia all point to the need to understand the conflict setting to construct peace operations properly. The United Nations has since implemented quite a few changes in the generation and execution of peace operations, but critical to all of this is an accurate understanding of the nuances of the operational background of the mission. Conceptual approaches like the grey zone provide valuable tools for defining this security environment.

Second, the need for a well-constructed United Nations *narrative* is fundamental. British researcher Emile Simpson explains this idea of the narrative in *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First-Century Combat as Politics*. He writes, “Strategic narrative expresses strategy as a story, to explain one’s actions.”⁴³ It serves several purposes, from aligning one’s forces by creating a common understanding and shared purpose to convincing opponents and others of one’s policy goals or ends. Pressures upon intricate societal systems can be myriad. Many disintegrating influences can reduce the efficiency of complex governmental, fiscal, social, and ecological structures. These include natural causes, like drought, fires, floods, and seismic or volcanic activity; intentional threats, including grey zone conflict, hybrid activities, or war; or a combination of man-made and natural effects, such as the Covid-19 pandemic. These shocks can result in significant stresses on social systems, like population migration, climate change, and ecological breakdown, which are examples that have historically foreshadowed the collapse of civilizations. Narratives can assist in fostering the social resilience necessary to resist societal shocks and stresses. Furthermore, a narrative can help form a solid core to which others (non-member states, international organizations and others) can coalesce.⁴⁴

Third, and most importantly, *partnering* with other states, international organizations, and civilian agencies, to name a few, will allow for integrated activities that address the ways and means of a comprehensive approach to pre-empt, disrupt, or neutralize oppositional actors in the search for peace. The ideas behind the comprehensive approach have evolved dramatically over the last few decades. However, they remained concentrated on forming relationships and creating partnered activities to deal with issues of mutual interest. This can be discerned in ideas of peacebuilding from the 1990s that focused on achieving a lasting resolution to violent conflict by establishing a sustainable

peace. This was done through comprehensive processes that would strengthen conflict and post-conflict regions. Today, these ideas are applied to a broader range of uncertainties. The challenges of insecurity are such that they need a comprehensive approach permitting a wide variety of actions by non-military and military actors.⁴⁵

This idea of partnering may be the panacea to some structural barriers within the United Nations. Unanimity within the General Assembly or Security Council is not necessary for the various organizations of the United Nations to collaborate with partners to protect or rebuild societal resilience. While this approach would not, at times, permit the full deployment of multidimensional United Nations peace operations, it would allow engagement in a wide array of humanitarian and peacemaking endeavours through partnering. The International Crisis Group has analyzed current and future challenges to the United Nations' effectiveness and similarly suggests:

The gloom shrouding the organization does not mean that the UN has been rendered a bystander in world affairs. As a platform for diplomacy and a centre of operations, it continues to tackle an array of crises and conflicts. UN aid agencies and peace operations retain substantial, and sometimes unique, conflict management capabilities. Even where the UN faces abuse and is at risk of being sidelined, as in Gaza or Myanmar, it offers assistance—however insufficient—to civilians whom others cannot reach. In the diplomatic realm, the UN is still the one venue where all states can make their voices heard on the major crises of the day.⁴⁶

In part, to address the circumstances and demands creating possibilities for peace, many structural arrangements have developed to allow participating actors to share a helpful role in peace operations. These vary from (1) collaboration, or cooperation without any formal agreements; (2) sequencing, a transfer of operations from one entity to another; (3) parallel provisions, where two types of actors work together at the same time, each contributing in their own way; (4) hybrid structures, where two groups combine for a single operation; and (5) support, an arrangement in which one actor supports the mission while the other undertakes operations related to the mission. The United Nations has used these arrangements over the last decades in peace operations to establish a solid and enduring peace.⁴⁷ They can also assist with creating initiatives, however modest, that can help reduce the violence and disintegration occurring in the international setting, even when the Security Council is unable to reach a consensus.⁴⁸

The implications of this exploration of the opportunities and challenges of peace operations lead to three relevant observations pertaining to encouraging resilient societies and supporting peace operations legitimacy.

First, strategic clarity is required in understanding the operational environment. This is necessary to comprehend the type of peace operation needed, its mandate and composition. Without such understanding an integrated strategy capable of addressing the root causes will not be possible.

Second, the need for a well constructed strategic narrative is fundamental. It serves several purposes, from aligning one's own forces through the creation of common understanding and shared purpose, to convincing opponents and others of one's policy goals or ends.

Third, strategic partnering with other states, international organizations, and civilian agencies, to name a few, will allow for integrated activities that will address the ways and means of a comprehensive approach to pre-empt, disrupt, or neutralize the behaviours of oppositional actors in the search for peace.

“By, With, Through”⁴⁹

Today's complex challenges can only be addressed through networked multilateralism and strong partnerships—locally, regionally and globally...⁵⁰—Jean-Pierre Lacroix, United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations (2024)

Regardless of arguments for or against the usefulness of United Nations activities in creating peace within a fractured, violent, and oft-changing security situation, frequently involving intra-state actors, prolific peace operations researchers Paul Williams and Alex Bellamy contend that the overall impact of United Nations peace operations has been, and is, positive. First, the United Nations tends to deploy to regions where other intervention forces do not. Second, United Nations peace operations create a lasting end to the conflict. Third, United Nations involvement can reduce the length of conflict and inhibit the re-eruption of violence. Fourth, United Nations peacekeeping forces and organizations assist in containing the spread of conflict. Fifth, United Nations organizations help establish discussions leading to local or social peace. Last, United Nations peace activities can assist in protecting civilians from atrocities.⁵¹ This exploration of the United Nations' multidimensional peace operations supports these contentions.

Many opportunities and challenges are associated with United Nations peace operations, and this research has highlighted principal examples of each. The possibilities inherent in these peace activities lead to a more durable and lasting peace. Still, at the same time, a nuanced understanding, or *clarity*, of the operational environment is crucial for mitigating challenges and achieving effective conflict prevention, management, and resolution. In this environment, creating or enhancing societal resilience in populations affected by disaster and war and establishing and maintaining legitimacy are two significant lines of effort for any peace operation. These foci can be assisted by contributing efforts like establishing and promulgating a shared *narrative* and *partnering* with others under flexible arrangements.

In this effort to establish and maintain peace, the United Nations is an international organization able to conduct peace activities alone, with others, or through others. Only in this way will the United Nations adapt to a changing continuum of insecurity, with shifts created by new technologies, climate change, and an expanding urbanization footprint. Considering the points raised within this chapter, the United Nations system, despite ongoing challenges in the Security Council, will be able to adjust to the reality of these emerging conflict trends and internal challenges by using and structuring partnerships to create and support productive multidimensional peace operations.

Endnotes

1. Quote is taken from António Guterres' swearing-in ceremony before taking office as the United Nations Secretary-General. Jenni Lee, December 21, 2016 "United Nations Foundation: 8 Key Quotes from Secretary-General-Designate António Guterres," <https://www.easybib.com/guides/citation-guides/chicago-turabian/how-to-cite-a-blog-chicago-turabian/>.
2. This is the inscription on the reverse of the standard United Nations peacekeeping medal. United Nations, "United Nations and Peacekeeping, What is peacekeeping, Our peacekeepers, United Nations Medals" (accessed 20 May 2024), n.p., <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/united-nations-medals>.
3. Not all agree that the United Nations can be effective in modern international peacekeeping. For a counter perspective, see Peter Nadin, "The United Nations: A History of Success and Failure" *Australian Quarterly* 90, no. 4 (2019): 11–17, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26773344>.
4. See Ana E. Juncos and Jonathan Joseph. "Resilient Peace: Exploring the Theory and Practice of Resilience in Peacebuilding Interventions," *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding* 14, no. 3 (2020): 289–302.

5. See Walter Dorn, "Peace Operations: Terms & Definitions" (unpublished brief, House of Commons Standing Committee on National Defence, 11 May 2018), 1–9, https://walterdorn.net/pdf/Definitions-Peace-Operations-Doctrine_with-Annex1_11May2018.pdf.
6. "... a growing number of UN peacekeeping operations have become multidimensional, composed of a range of components including military, civilian police, political, civil affairs, rule of law, human rights, humanitarian, reconstruction, public information and gender. Some of these operations do not have a military component but carry out their mandates alongside a regional or multinational peacekeeping force." United Nations, Department of Peacekeeping Operations, *Handbook on United Nations Multidimensional Peacekeeping Operations* (New York: Peacekeeping Best Practices Unit United Nations, 2003), 1.
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11. See Alex J. Bellamy and Charles T. Hunt, "Twenty-first Century UN peace operations: Protection, force and the changing security environment," *International Affairs* 91, no. 6 (November 2015): 1277–98.
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16. See Sarah Shamim, “Israel attacks UN peacekeepers in Lebanon: Why it’s such a big deal,” *Al Jazeera* (11 October 2024), n.p., <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/11/israel-attacks-un-peacekeepers-in-lebanon-why-its-such-a-big-deal>. This article notes: “UNIFIL is the most dangerous of the peacekeeping missions, having suffered the most casualties. In its 46 years, 337 peacekeepers have been killed.”
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