
UN PEACEKEEPING IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA

Muzaffer Ercan Yılmaz Bandırma Economics and Political Sciences Faculty
Department of International Relations
Balıkesir University
Bandırma, Balıkesir
Turkey

Muzaffer Ercan Yılmaz, is an assistant professor of Conflict Resolution and International Relations (IR) at Balıkesir University, Bandırma Economics and Public Administration Faculty, Bandırma/Balıkesir. He graduated from Ankara University in 1994, completed his M.A. in International Politics from The American University, Washington, D.C. in 1998, and earned his Ph.D in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia in 2002. He taught Introduction to Conflict Resolution at George Mason University. He has been at Balıkesir University since 2003, teaching Political History and International Relations theory. His research interests particularly include social identity and inter-group relations, peacekeeping and peacemaking in the post-Cold War era, international mediation, and the Cyprus conflict.

This article evaluates United Nations (UN) peacekeeping operations in the post-Cold War era in terms of its strengths and shortcomings. Particular attention is devoted to internal strife that dominates the Cold War period as the principal sources of current conflicts. In coping with such conflicts, the utility of UN peacekeeping is underlined. But many of the problems UN peacekeeping has faced are also addressed, including recruiting qualified personnel, finance, expanding use of peace missions, training and language problems, as well as structural constraints on successful operations. The study draws attention to the need for overcoming the present weaknesses of UN peacekeeping to make it a more efficient tool of international peace and conflict resolution.

INTRODUCTION

The post-Second World War period has witnessed a rapid decline in traditional interstate conflicts, and a comparable rise in internal ones. This trend appears to be holding. In fact, one of the few clear aspects of the post-Cold War world is the prevalence of strife within countries or between those just made independent. Sometimes the fighting is between groups defined by ethnicity or tribe. Sometimes the government, or the lack of it, is the main problem. In any case, the result is conflict that bears many of the characteristics of civil war, such as the absence of a clear battlefield, no sharp line between combatant and civilian, multiple parties with uneven

force, and deep mistrust that make the fighting continue. Many of the recent examples include conflict in Somalia, Rwanda, Kosovo, the Congo, East Timor (now independent Timor-Leste), Liberia, Haiti, and Sudan.

When civil war-like conflicts occur, it would be natural to assume that the parties should settle their own conflict, since this is their concern, their business. But most of the time, because of uncontrolled escalation, as well as the psychological components of conflict (e.g., the tension of hostility, the lack of trust, the mutual suspicion, the impulse to secrecy, the biased communication, and so on), conflicting parties are the least equipped to stop fighting and design a solution by themselves. Thus, third-party intervention often becomes a necessity in the process of conflict resolution and peacemaking.

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The term “third-party intervention” conveys a different range of methods, whereby a variety of external parties (e.g., regional or major powers, the United Nations (UN), and non-governmental organizations) may become involved in attempts to cope with a given conflict. This article focuses on one

of the most visible forms of third-party intervention in violent conflicts at the international level: UN peacekeeping. Among third-parties, the UN has a special place due to its mission of being the grand guardian of international peace and security. Thus, parties in conflict oftentimes expect more from the UN than any other third-party that may have an incentive to exploit their issue. But the question in this regard is: how effective is the UN in dealing with violent internal conflicts that have replaced the Cold War’s ideological clashes as the principal sources of current conflicts? The purpose of this article is to find some answers to this critical question by evaluating UN peacekeeping in terms of both its strengths and weaknesses, in conjunction with post-Cold War developments. Based on that evaluation, several implications are also addressed to improve the utility of UN peacekeeping so that it could become a more efficient tool of international peacemaking.

UN PEACEKEEPING AND ITS EVOLUTION TILL THE END OF THE COLD WAR

The basic definition of UN peacekeeping refers to a UN-led international activity that involves the interposition of military personnel in units between conflicting groups, either to stop violence or to prevent it. The groups to be kept apart would be state agents, paramilitaries, militia, guerrilla groups, or even mobs. What they all share is a desire to use violence against the other side as a way of conducting their conflict.

A broader understanding of UN peacekeeping, as it has evolved after the Cold War, on the other hand, goes far beyond just coping with physical violence. It refers to a multinational involvement in conflict settings organized by the UN to create conditions for sustainable peace. UN peacekeepers (military officers, civilian police officers, and civilian personnel from many different countries) help to build peace and assist combatants to reach a mutually acceptable solution, or monitor the peace agreement if already signed. Such assistance manifests itself in many forms, including—but not limited to—confidence-building measures, power-sharing agreements, electoral support, and economic and social development. (See Berdal, 2003; Serafino, 2005).

Up to the present time, there have been 60 peacekeeping operations and 17 of them are still active. Ironically, the term peacekeeping is not specifically mentioned anywhere in the UN Charter. Indeed, the precise charter basis for many UN peacekeeping operations has remained ambiguous for decades. Peacekeeping evolved as a pragmatic solution in the early years of the organization when it became apparent that some of the Charter provisions relating to the maintenance of international peace and security could not be implemented as envisaged. In this respect, peacekeeping was often referred to as a “Chapter 6-and-a-half” activity, meaning that it fell somewhere between Chapter 6 (on the Pacific Settlement of Disputes) and Chapter 7 (on Action with Respect to Threats to Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression) (Roberts, 1996, p. 298).

Until the collapse of communism in the late 1980s, there were only 13 UN peacekeeping operations, most of which concerned conflicts that had arisen after European de-colonization. Many other issues, particularly East-West conflicts, on the other hand, were dealt with outside the UN

due to the lack of cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union.

As they evolved from the 1950s to the 1980s, the traditional tasks of UN peacekeeping operations included interposing between conflicting parties and monitoring cease-fires. These tasks were usually carried out on the ground of three key principles: the consent of the parties, impartiality (of peacekeepers), and non-use of force.

The principle of non-use of force was especially central to UN peacekeeping for many years. In fact, more than half the UN peacekeeping operations before 1988 had consisted only of unarmed military observers and not counting situational exceptions, force was used only in cases of self-defense (Liu, 1992). But non-use of force, at times, made peacekeeping forces ineffective as well. For example, on Cyprus in 1974 and in Lebanon in 1982, the presence of UN peacekeeping could not prevent the breakdown of order and subsequent foreign invasions. Nevertheless, the achievements of UN peacekeeping forces between 1948-1988 were modestly successful, overall. They included effective freezing of many international conflicts, some reduction of competitive interventions by neighboring or major powers, and the isolation of local conflicts from the Cold-War's ideological struggle (United Nations, 1990; Durch, 1993; Goulding, 1993).

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UN PEACEKEEPING IN THE POST COLD-WAR ERA

Since mid-1988, there has been a great expansion in the number of peacekeeping forces. From 1948 to 1978, only a total of 13 peacekeeping forces were set up, and in the following ten-year period, no new forces were

established. From May 1988 to October 1993, a further twenty forces were created. As of June 2005, the number of UN peacekeeping operations has reached 60, 17 of which are still operating in the field, involving 66,547 military personnel and civilian police.

A main reason for this expansion has been the increased capacity of the UN Security Council to agree on action in security crises since the end of the Cold War. The decreasing ideological clashes between the United States and Soviet Union manifested itself most clearly in the decline of the veto at the Security Council. For instance, from 1945 to 1990 the permanent members of the Security Council cast the following number of vetoes: China, 3; France, 18; United Kingdom, 30; US, 69; and the Soviet Union, 114. Then, between June 1990 and May 1993 there was no single veto. One exception occurred in May 1993 when Russia blocked a resolution on financing the peacekeeping force on Cyprus. With this exception, the post-Cold War capacity of the Security Council to reach agreement has survived and constituted a key reason for the increase in the number of peacekeeping operations.

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A further reason for the expansion of peacekeeping operations is also linked with the end of the Cold War in that the post-Cold War era has generally demanded an increasing need for international peacekeeping forces. For example, in the early 1990s the collapse of two federal communist states, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, produced many ethnic conflicts (i.e., in Bosnia and Georgia) that called for active UN interventions. Also, a series of peace agreements on Afghanistan, Angola, Namibia, Central America, and Cambodia called for impartial international forces to assist in implementing cease-fires, troop withdrawals, and elections. Since the late 1990s, local conflicts in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, the Congo, East Timor, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, Haiti, Brundi, and Sudan required peacekeeping operations as well, either to stop violence or to monitor and help the following peace process.

Finally, after the end of the Cold War, the major powers were less likely than before to see an international conflict as part of a challenge from their

major global adversary that required a unilateral military response. Hence, in a new spirit of cooperation, they were more willing to see a response emerging within a UN framework.

Apart from the numerical increase in peacekeeping forces, since the end of the Cold War UN peacekeeping operations have also involved a great number of activities that have been either totally new or implemented on a much larger scale than before, such as:

- Monitoring and even running local elections, as in Namibia, Angola, Mozambique, the Congo, and East Timor.
- Protecting certain areas as “safe areas” from adversary attacks so that people feel secure at least in these areas.
- Guarding the weapons surrendered by or taken from the parties in conflict.
- Ensuring the smooth delivery of humanitarian relief supplies during an ongoing conflict, as typically the case in Somalia, Rwanda, Liberia, and Sudan.
- Assisting in the reconstruction of state functions in war-torn societies, as in Bosnia Herzegovina, El Salvador, the Congo, East Timor, and Liberia (Eide, 2001; Berdal, 2003).

THE EFFICACY OF UN PEACEKEEPING

The ending of the Cold War has created a new optimistic view about international relations among many whereby it has become fashionable to speak that force, in the form of military power, has run its course in international politics. By extension, many (e.g., Fleitz, 2002) also attempted to dismiss peacekeeping as a peace strategy. Such a view tends to see peacekeeping as an attempt to contain violence rather than ending it.

This may sound fine, but too idealistic to fit the realities of the actually turbulent world of the post Cold-War period, dominated by internal struggles. In coping with such frequently violent conflicts, peacekeeping often emerges as a necessary element of conflict management and has a role to play in the overall process of peacemaking. Especially when adversaries are engaged in mutual violence or armed clashes, peacekeeping appears to be the most urgent strategy. Until violence is stopped, or at least managed,

it is unlikely that any attempts to resolve competing interests, to change negative attitudes, or to alter socio-economic circumstances giving rise to conflict will be successful. By far, thousands of civilian and military peacekeepers who have toiled over the past five decades have been successful, in general, in keeping people alive and in preventing conflict escalation.

Likewise, in the absence of peacekeeping forces, any group wishing to sabotage a peace initiative may find it easier to provoke armed clashes with the other side, since there is no impartial buffer between the sides that can act as a restraining influence. The absence of a suitable control mechanism may enable even a small group of people committed to violence to wreak enormous havoc, whereas the presence of an impartial third force can be an important factor for stability. Historically, UN peacekeeping has been, and still is in most parts of the world, acceptable as a third-party in a way that a purely national or even regional military presence would not be. This is mainly because the UN, as the supposed guardian of international peace and security, has no particular stake in an outcome apart from a satisfactory reduction in violence. It is therefore less likely for a nation-state, or even a regional organization, to exploit conflicts for its own ends.

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In addition to dealing with physical violence, UN peacekeeping forces can also help peacebuilding processes by providing international assistance. In fact, in the post-Cold War period UN peacekeeping has displayed a greater degree of flexibility in adapting itself to new circumstances as they called for new forms of action. Peacekeeping operations expanded to include rule of law, civil administration, human rights, and even economic development. Thus, peacekeeping came to involve more and more non-military elements to ensure sustainability. The UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations was created in 1992 to support this increased demand for complex peacekeeping, as well. Here are some success stories:

Bosnia and Herzegovina

When the UN peacekeeping in Bosnia Herzegovina (UNMIBH) ended operations in December 2002, the most extensive police reform and re-structuring project ever undertaken by the UN had been completed. UNMIBH had trained and accredited an approximately 17,000 national police force. This force has been quite successful in maintaining internal security, while also making progress in curbing smuggling, the narcotics trade, and human trafficking.

East Timor

The UN was called in to East Timor in late 1999 to guide the Timorese toward statehood in the wake of violence and devastation which followed a UN-led consultation on integration with Indonesia. The UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) established an effective administration whereby it enabled refugees to return, helped to develop civil and social services, ensured humanitarian assistance, and supported capacity-building for self-governance. The UN still has a peacekeeping presence in independent Timor-Leste (UNMISET) to assist in building administrative structures and developing the police service.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Progress has been achieved by the UN Organization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) as well, suffering from a prolonged civil war. From a small observer mission in 2000, MONUC evolved to become, first, a disengagement and monitoring mission, then an assistance mission for disarmament and resettlement, and now a complex mission tasked with facilitating the transitional process through national elections. At present a large portion of the country is at peace, and steps have been taken towards re-unification and further stability.

Liberia

The UN peacekeeping mission in Liberia (UNMIL) has also been very successful in assisting in the implementation of a comprehensive peace agree-

ment. Violence and cease-fire violations decreased, the security situation improved dramatically. The ongoing deployment of UN personnel is currently facilitating the restoration of civil administration and governance.

THE CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMATICAL AREAS

While there cannot be any objection, in principle, to increasing missions and expanding tasks, UN peacekeeping operations in the post-Cold War period have begun to suffer some fundamental weaknesses as well. These can be summarized as follows:

First, it seems that there is a growing disparity between the capacity of the UN and demands of international peace and security. As of mid-2005, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations is managing 17 field operations throughout the world, including

a recently expanded operation in Cote d'Ivoire and three newly established missions in Burundi, Haiti, and Sudan. As a result, the number of UN personnel deployed in peacekeeping operations is expected to reach some 78,000 by the end of 2005. But the crucial question arising in this regard

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is: who will provide the growing peacekeeping personnel?

The United Nations Charter stipulates that to assist in maintaining peace and security around the world, all member states of the UN should make available to the Security Council necessary armed forces and facilities. Since the first peacekeeping operation in 1948, the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in Palestine, about 130 nations have contributed military and civilian police personnel to peace operations. While detailed records of all personnel who have served in peacekeeping missions are not available, it is estimated that up to one million soldiers, police officers and civilians have served under the UN flag in the last 56 years.

Despite the large number of contributions, one of the main problems at present is that several of the world's most capable militaries, including the United States and British military, are heavily committed in a long-term struggle of defeating terrorism, thereby focusing on certain countries, such

as Iraq and Afghanistan. Their priority is not to be the world police but defending their people and national interests against terrorist actions, in particular, and revisionist movements, in general.

Further, since the Clinton administration, the United States has had a tendency to consider UN peacekeeping operations as an “extra burden,” thus becoming extremely selective in participating in them. In fact, on May 5, 1994, the Clinton administration’s long-planned Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) 25 on “multilateral peace operations” was unveiled. The directive had been foreshadowed in (former) President Clinton’s speech at the UN General Assembly on September 27, 1993, in which he had warned against the UN’s reach exceeding its grasp and had suggested some conditions for United States participation in new peacekeeping missions. The overall approach of PDD-25 was to view peacekeeping as a scarce resource. It strongly affirmed that the United States involvement in peacekeeping had to be selective. Before there could be United States support for multilateral peace operations, said the report, the following factors had to be considered: the possibilities of advancing United States interests; the existence of a clear threat to international peace and security; clear objectives; the means to accomplish the mission; consideration of the consequences of inaction; realistic criteria for ending the operation; and, the consent of the parties to the conflict and a cease-fire.

Obviously, these conditions are rarely met in real-world conflict settings. Besides, the interpretation of the United States has been subjective and selective in accordance with her immediate interests. Accordingly, because of both PDD-25 and the priority of struggle against terrorism, the United States has been reluctant to participate in multinational peacekeeping operation up to the present time. As a matter of fact, currently only one percent of the troops and civilian police deployed in UN peacekeeping missions come from the United States (*UN Monthly Summary*, 2005).

On the other hand, the contributions of other major powers are also rather limited. For example, the Russian participation in peacekeeping personnel at present is a little more than one percent while about ten percent come from the European Union. China’s contribution is approximately six percent, and Japan does not provide any personnel at all (See, *UN Monthly Summary*, 2005).

So the little and reluctant support of great powers make developing

nations as main contributors of peacekeeping personnel. In fact, as of June 2005, the ten main troop-contributing countries include Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Ethiopia, Nepal, Ghana, Nigeria, Jordan, Uruguay, and South Africa. But these countries have generally limited means and qualified personnel. Thus, finding troop contingents for burgeoning peacekeeping operations still remains a major concern. A further challenge involves meeting demands for the recruitment of thousands of skilled police officers and civilian staff with expertise in conflict resolution, justice, civil administration, economic development and other specialized fields. UN peacekeeping must also secure other capabilities, such as tactical air support, field medical facilities and movement control operations—resources usually provided by willing member states.

Apart from the personnel issue, the budgeting of expanding peacekeeping operations constitutes another problematic area. At its peak in the post-Cold War period, in the 1993-1994 period, the UN peacekeeping budget was \$3.6 billion, which supported 17 peace operations involving as many as 70,000 personnel in the field and their logistic requirements. By the year 1998, the costs dropped to just under \$1 billion. But with the resurgence of larger-scale operations, the costs for UN peacekeeping rose to \$3 billion in 2001-2002. The approved peacekeeping budget for the year 2004-2005 is \$2.80 billion. Yet with the additional requirements of the new and recently expanded missions, that amount could grow by a further \$2.38 billion.

Who pays the bill? Legally, all member states are obliged to pay their share of peacekeeping costs under a complex formula shaped mainly in accordance with their economic capacity. But in spite of this legal obligation, member states have been reluctant to pay. As of February 28, 2005, they owe approximately \$2.25 billion in current and back peacekeeping dues. The largest debtors are the Russian Federation (over \$500 million) and the United States (\$743 million).

To overcome the financial crisis, many alternative financing sources have been proposed. These include instituting a global tax on currency transactions, environmental taxes, and taxes on international transportation and arms trade. Yet major powers in general, and the United States in particular, are reluctant to reform the system, fearing that they would lose political leverage.

There are other issues with respect to the financial problem. For example, the system of apportioning peacekeeping expenses among UN member states has upset various major powers. The United States has long been expected to bear over thirty percent of the costs of the UN peacekeeping operations and wants that figure reduced to twenty-five percent. By contrast, over 150 states are apportioned for peacekeeping at either one-tenth or one-fifth of their regular UN dues, a situation that clearly requires some modification. An additional problem is that dues for each peacekeeping operation are collected separately, so each member state receives a large number of bills in any given year, most of the time for operations in which it may feel it has little at stake. As a result, the question of apportionment and effective payment of peacekeeping dues remains a big problem. For UN operations to be effective, this problem calls for an urgent, and realistic, solution by the UN General Assembly.

In addition to the problems of personnel and finance, many of the expanded tasks of UN peacekeeping operations proved to problematic in practice. For example, assisting democracy or certain governmental functions in states that has experienced civil wars depends upon local cooperation and when this cooperation is denied, serious problems begin regarding the operational success (Fortna, 2004). After all, peacekeepers are alien forces and they cannot function successfully without some local support. Likewise, the establishment of safe areas in war-torn societies threatened the impartiality of UN as peacekeeping units utilized force to establish such areas and to protect them from external attacks (Fletiz, 2002; Fortna, 2003). Even in the case of humanitarian relief, the delivery of aid often produced a failure for the UN personnel to think more deeply about the root causes of conflicts. In other words, focusing on satisfying immediate physical needs of people, like food or medical assistance, little or no attention has been devoted to the problems that created the need for aid and policies for tackling them (Norberg, 2003).

Above all, the central problem in the expansion of UN peacekeeping tasks is the blurring of the distinction between peacekeeping and coercive action. Providing order in many conflicting areas of the world has inevitably resulted in increasing militarization of peace missions. This, then, made UN peacekeeping forces face a serious dilemma: remaining passively impartial or establishing order, even at the cost of use of force. The latest

examples reveal that UN peacekeeping forces take a more activist mission in which there has been a much reduced emphasis on consent and non-use of force. As a matter of fact, many post-Cold War peacekeeping forces, such as UNPROFOR in the former Yugoslavia, UNOSOM I and UNOSOM II in Somalia, UNMEE in Ethiopia and Eritrea, and UNMIL in Liberia, have been set up largely within the framework of Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, downgrading the consent of conflicting parties and leaving greater room for the use of force, as needed. This reduced emphasis on consent and non-use of force was caused by a desire to overcome the past weaknesses of peacekeeping operations, such as in the Middle East in 1967 and in 1974 on Cyprus where peacekeepers were unable to prevent foreign invasions. In addition, there has been a need for a new approach to consent, for in cases of armed conflicts, a peacekeeping force cannot rely on the consent of every local leader.

However, the increasing militarization of UN peacekeeping forces leads to many serious problems. One is that any strong use of force in war-torn societies frequently involves killing or injuring civilians, as well as adversaries. When this happens, as it did in Somalia in the early 1990s, the UN, in general, and its leading members, in particular, risk being accused

of acting in a colonial manner (Bellmy and Williams, 2004). Second, the use of force undermines inevitably the impartiality of peacekeeping forces. This, in turn, leads to a decline in the credibility of peacekeepers (Donald, 2003). Lastly, the UN system of decisionmaking is not well geared to controlling major uses of force. When violent situations call for heavier tactics, disagreements tend to arise among the participants of peacekeepers regarding the degree of UN control. This was particularly the case during the Bosnian conflict in which the United Kingdom and France were reluctant to follow the UN authority on the ground.

Another problematic area is training and language. Troops, civilian police and other personnel have been, and still are, of extraordinarily uneven

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quality. In spite of the UN's urgent need for such personnel, there must be higher standards that UN personnel are required to meet before they can be dispatched on a peacekeeping operation.

As for language, UN personnel are often crippled by two kinds of language problems. First, different contingents in the same unit may have a difficulty in communicating with one another. Second, the contingents may not be able to communicate effectively with the local population. This can be particularly crippling when there is a need for intelligence, policing, and administration (Roberts, 1996: 316).

A final shortcoming of UN peacekeeping at present is that establishing these missions still necessitates a consensus among permanent members of the Security Council. It was addressed above how peacekeeping was paralyzed by the veto power during the Cold War era. The end of the Cold War has resulted in a spirit of cooperation and excluded largely the former ideological clashes between the United States and Russia. But no one can guarantee that this trend will continue. The fact that the future of UN peacekeeping will depend on major-power cooperation is a frightening reality and inevitably gives rise to serious doubts with respect to the prospects of peace missions.

CONCLUSION

In coping with internal strives of the post-Cold War era, the utility of UN peacekeeping cannot be denied. Failure by the international community to try to control such conflicts and resolve them peacefully may lead to wider conflicts, affecting eventually many actors that may be far away from the conflict zone. In today's interdependent world, few modern conflicts can be regarded as truly local, but most others are not. Indeed, the post-Cold War period has shown how quickly intra-state conflicts in one country can spread and destabilize their entire region. Thus, international cooperation is essential for a stable, peaceful world. UN peacekeeping, in this respect, is an indispensable tool. Its legitimacy and universality are unique, acting on behalf of 191 member states. Overall, compared to the cost of war, in both financial and human terms, peacekeeping is the "cheap" alternative in the process of conflict resolution. Moreover, "UN peacekeeping can open doors which might otherwise remain closed to efforts in peacemaking and

peace-building, to secure lasting peace.”

On the other hand, as the above discussions attest, the problems UN peacekeeping faces today confirm that a general and uniform global system of peacekeeping is still not imminent. UN peacekeeping is patchy, ad hoc, and contingent upon the interests and cooperation of major states, while also more appropriate in some situations than in others. In fact, the issue of selectivity may have to be more openly recognized if a capacity to engage in collective military action under UN auspices is to be maintained. It is vital that the achievements, reputation, and future possibilities of UN peacekeeping operations not be undermined by its involvement in too many conflicts and by a failure to address some of the difficult questions that the UN has been faced.

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