

## Peace Briefing

### Perspectives on the United Nations

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**The United Nations was created “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war...” It was founded in response to World War II to prevent war by negotiation, sanctions and collective security.**

The emergence of supranational parliamentary institutions to keep the peace is well known. Founded in 1945, the United Nations emerged out of the League of Nations. Both organizations were responses to the World Wars. While the United Nations remains imperfect, its goal - to prevent war by negotiation, sanctions, and collective security - is revolutionary in the long history of warfare.

A myriad books, articles, reports and commentaries continuously examine and scrutinize the United Nations as a whole, its programs and its effectiveness. This briefing gives an overview of three different perspectives.

*UNTold: The real story of the United Nations in peace and war* (2017) by Ian Williams is an excellent primer that not only walks the reader through the basic history and trajectory of the organization, but also provides a sometimes-entertaining explanation of the structures, programs, successes and failures. Williams recognizes the often-valid critique of the organization, but credits the collectivity of the global community in its focus on international problems. A complex supra-national institution with laudable ideals is explained in an understandable manner. Williams argues that “the UN has improved the world in more ways than we can recount in a short book like this.”

In his book *Winning the War on War. The Decline of Armed Conflict Worldwide* (2011), Joshua Goldstein credits the United Nations and its active role in peacekeeping with the decline in interstate warfare. Goldstein too recognizes the failures and mistakes, but argues that the UN has been able to assess those and improve the practices. The book provides valuable insights on the role of UN peacekeeping missions on a global level. It should be noted, that peacekeeping interventions introduce armed forces into a conflict. That means these

steps must be not only be viewed as the last resort, but recognized as greater militarization of ongoing conflicts. The War Prevention Initiative's basic premise is that there are always better and more effective nonviolent alternatives to war and violence than military means.

World Beyond War's book *A Global Security System. An Alternative to War* (2017 Edition) recognizes the role of the United Nations can play in a world without war. A key recommendation by World Beyond War is to move away from armed peacekeeping, to nonviolent intervention through civilian peacekeeping forces. As to the United Nations bodies, dramatic reforms of the organization and its structure are necessary. Key areas of reform are the composition of the Security Council, the elimination of the Veto, and the provision of adequate funding. In addition, the International Court of Justice, the principal judicial body of the United Nations, and the International Criminal Court, the body to prosecute individuals for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, need to be strengthened.

The United Nations is part of what historian Kent Shifferd calls an evolving Global Peace System, where international institutions aimed at controlling war are part of global collaboration. The goals of the United Nations are laudable and should be supported, while acknowledging the need for reforms.

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