History of United Nations Peacekeeping Operations During the Cold War: 1945 to 1987

Series Editor

Ramona Taheri

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Cover photo: UN Photo #122816 by John Isaac. A Swedish soldier at an observation post in the town of Srifa, Southern Lebanon. 10 April 1978.

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Williamsburg, VA 23185 USA
www.peaceopstraining.org

First edition: 1997 by F. T. Liu
Second edition: 2006 by Sunil Ram

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Method of Study

This self-paced course aims to give students flexibility in their approach to learning. The following steps are meant to provide motivation and guidance about some possible strategies and minimum expectations for completing this course successfully:

- Before you begin studying, first browse through the entire course. Notice the lesson and section titles to get an overall idea of what will be involved as you proceed.
- The material is meant to be relevant and practical. Instead of memorizing individual details, strive to understand concepts and overall perspectives in regard to the United Nations system.
- Set personal guidelines and benchmarks regarding how you want to schedule your time.
- Study the lesson content and the learning objectives. At the beginning of each lesson, orient yourself to the main points. If possible, read the material twice to ensure maximum understanding and retention, and let time elapse between readings.
- At the end of each lesson, take the End-of-Lesson Quiz. Clarify any missed questions by rereading the appropriate sections, and focus on retaining the correct information.
- After you complete all of the lessons, prepare for the End-of-Course Examination by taking time to review the main points of each lesson. Then, when ready, log into your online student classroom and take the End-of-Course Examination in one sitting.

» ***Access your online classroom at <www.peaceopstraining.org/users/user_login> from virtually anywhere in the world.***

- Your exam will be scored electronically. If you achieve a passing grade of 75 per cent or higher on the exam, you will be awarded a Certificate of Completion. If you score below 75 per cent, you will be given one opportunity to take a second version of the End-of-Course Examination.
- A note about language: This course uses English spelling according to the standards of the Oxford English Dictionary (United Kingdom) and the United Nations Editorial Manual.

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LESSON 1

The Genesis of Peacekeeping

UN Photo #143819 by Ryan Brown.

It has been argued by some historians that the origins of peacekeeping go as far back as the Delian League of ancient Greece in the fifth century, BCE.

In this lesson »

Section 1.1 Genesis of UN Peacekeeping Operations

Section 1.2 UN Collective Security System

Section 1.3 The Korean Crisis and Its Aftermath

Section 1.4 Increasing the Role of the General Assembly

Section 1.5 Summary

Lesson Objectives »

- Explain the original UN system of collective security as outlined in Chapters VI and VII of the Charter.
- Understand the impact of superpower rivalry in the evolution of peacekeeping operations.
- Explain what overall steps are taken to establish a mission, as well as the chain of responsibilities related to each step.
- Identify and explain the early predecessor of peacekeeping operations, namely, the UN intervention in Korea and how it impacted UN policy towards international peacekeeping.

The Earl of Halifax, Ambassador to the United States; member of the Delegation from the United Kingdom, signing the United Nations Charter at a ceremony held at the Veterans' War Memorial Building. 26 June 1945. UN Photo #235962 by Yould.

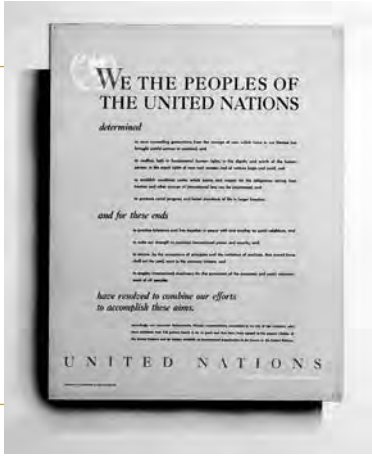
Section 1.1 Genesis of UN Peacekeeping Operations

It has been argued by some historians that the origins of peacekeeping go as far back as the Delian League of ancient Greece in the fifth century, BCE. But, like the Delian League, on closer examination, these examples of "proto" peacekeeping were ordinary alliances that had little to do with ethical issues surrounding peace. From a western perspective, the closest example from history that first tried to personify what we see today as peacekeeping was initiated by the early medieval Catholic Church through its initiatives (the Peace of God and Truce of God) in the late tenth century to try and limit the spread of war. However, these ideas and some early attempts at arms control (i.e., the Second Lateran Council of 1139) were also initiated to allow the fury of inter-state war in Europe to be directed at the Muslim-dominated Middle East.

A new and radical idea was offered in 1623 by Emeric Crucé. He argued that all the leaders of the world, including all those outside of traditional Europe, should be included in an alliance that tried to resolve international disputes through mediation at a world council held in a neutral location. Over the next few centuries, more substantive European attempts were made to peace-orientated agreements included the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, Utrecht in 1713, Paris in 1763, and in the wake of the Napoleonic Wars the Concert of Europe in 1815-18. There were other attempts, but the first truly substantial system came into being after the horrors of World War I (1914-18). The League of Nations was the child of American President Woodrow Wilson, and it was an attempt at collective diplomacy and peace enforcement. It ultimately failed, but after the Second World War, the United Nations Organization (UNO) became the mechanism to implement collective diplomacy and peace.

The founders of the United Nations had not foreseen the possibility of engaging in peacekeeping operations (PKOs); thus, PKOs are not mentioned at all in the original UN Charter. Peacekeeping operations are essentially a practical mechanism used by the United Nations to contain international conflicts and to facilitate their settlement by peaceful means. However, tensions between the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (USSR) emerged after World War II and significantly affected the operation of the UN. This was known as the Cold War. What we now call peacekeeping came about out of necessity and was essentially an improvisation to respond to the growing tensions between the superpowers (the US and the USSR).

Under Article 25 of the Charter, Member States of the UN have agreed to "accept and carry out the decisions of the Security Council".[1] Therefore, under the Charter, the Security Council has the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Because of the increasing disagreement between the two superpowers, the original collective security system, which was based on peace enforcement by the Security Council and consensus by major powers, became unworkable. This led to the conception of PKOs. Early peacekeeping was a response to inter-state conflict, and ideally, it was conceived as a non-violent use of military force to preserve peace between warring state actors. Peacekeeping fell between Chapter VI and VII of the UN Charter, and in the future, it would be casually referred to as "Chapter VI ½ operations."



View the UN Charter online »

To read the entire founding document of the United Nations and to reference the articles mentioned in this lesson, access the Charter online at <www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>.

UN Photo #101834 by United Nations.

Section 1.2 UN Collective Security System

The original system devised by the United Nations to ensure the maintenance of international peace and security is outlined in Chapters VI and VII of the UN Charter. It was intended to provide a collective security system for Member Nations. Briefly, the original system was meant to function in the following manner:

1) United Nations, Charter of the United Nations, 26 June 1945. Available from: <http://www.un.org/en/sections/un-charter/un-charter-full-text/>.

CHAPTER VI: PEACEFUL RESOLUTION

When a dispute arises between two governments, the parties concerned are obligated under Chapter VI of the Charter to seek a solution by peaceful means, mainly by:

(a) Negotiation

(b) Conciliation

(c) Mediation

(d) Arbitration

(e) Peaceful settlement

(f) Resort to regional agencies or arrangements.

CHAPTER VII: ENFORCEMENT MEASURES

If the peaceful means fail and the dispute escalates into an armed conflict, then Chapter VII comes into play. Chapter VII constitutes the core of the UN Collective Security System. It provides that in the case of:

(a) A threat to the peace

(b) A breach of the peace

(c) An act of aggression

the Security Council may take enforcement measures to restore the situation. These enforcement measures are essentially:

(a) Arms embargoes

(b) Economic sanctions and, in the last resort,

(c) The use of force.

Plans for the use of force must be made by the Security Council with the assistance of the UN Military Staff Committee.

The five major powers, which played a key role in the creation of the United Nations, are Permanent Members of the Security Council, and each is endowed with the right of veto. These nations are China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (now Russia), the United Kingdom, and the United States. The same major powers also make up the Military Staff Committee. Thus, the Charter provisions on the collective use of force can be applied effectively only with their consent and with their continued cooperation. However, the Cold War broke out shortly after the establishment of the United Nations, and these conditions could not be met because the relations among the major powers, and especially between the two superpowers (the US and USSR), became marred by mistrust and disagreement. This lack of cooperation resulted in the Security Council resorting to other means by which to preserve peace and stability. Thus, the mediation, conciliation, good offices of the Secretary-General, and ultimately peacekeeping became these other means during the Cold War. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt had envisioned the Permanent Members of the Security Council as a team of “world policemen”; however, this never came to be. Instead, as peacekeeping evolved, peacekeeping troops were drawn on a voluntary basis from the Member States.

Peacekeeping began with unarmed observers and then evolved into missions that had both armed peacekeepers and unarmed military observers. The classical model of Cold War peacekeeping evolved over the 1950s; at this time, consent from the protagonists was required for peacekeeping intervention, impartiality was required from the deployed UN forces, and UN forces were only to resort to the use of arms in self-defence. There was only one instance during the Cold War in which the collective use of force was initiated under the Charter: the Korean Crisis in 1950.

Section 1.3 The Korean Crisis and Its Aftermath

The Charter provisions on the collective use of force in Korea were invoked in a roundabout way, occurring at the outset of the Korean crisis. When the North Korean army invaded South Korea in June 1950, the United States immediately brought the matter before the Security Council and proposed a series of draft resolutions.[2][3][4]

It asked the Council to:

a. Determine that the armed attack by North Korea was a breach of the peace.

b. Call upon North Korea to withdraw its forces forthwith to the 38th parallel.

c. Request Member States to provide military assistance to South Korea and make their military units available to a unified command under the United States.

d. Authorize the unified command to fly the United Nations flag.

These draft resolutions did not mention Chapter VII of the Charter.

At the time, the Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council because of the question of the representation of China at the UN. In the absence of the Soviet Union, the United States draft resolutions were adopted and provided the basis to establish the United Nations Forces in Korea. When the Soviet Union realized the consequences of its boycott, it resumed its seat in the Security Council at the beginning of August 1950; after it returned, the Council could no longer take any action on the Korean crisis.

A sign in Sariwon, Republic of Korea. 1 October 1950. UN Photo #187859 by Grant McLean.

The UN Forces in Korea were not a peacekeeping operation in the way that a PKO is normally defined because:

- The forces there were not directed by the Secretary-General.
- They used force.

Nor was it considered an enforcement operation under Chapter VII of the Charter, because:

- It was not under the control of the Security Council.
- The Council's enabling resolutions had not specifically invoked that Chapter.

2) UN Security Council, "Resolution 82 (1950)", S/RES/82 (1950), 25 June 1950.
3) UN Security Council, "Resolution 83 (1950)", S/RES/83 (1950), 27 June 1950.
4) UN Security Council, "Resolution 84 (1950)", S/RES/8 (1950), 7 July 1950.

It was a unique case made possible by the astonishing decision of the Soviet Union to stay away from the Security Council for six crucial weeks. The Soviet Union had boycotted the Security Council because the anti-communist government of Taiwan occupied the permanent Security Council seat held by China, instead of the mainland communist government. Why the Soviet Union waited that long to return to its seat on the Security Council remains one of the unresolved mysteries of the United Nations history.

Five men of the Army of the Republic of Korea, pose for the photographer with the UN flag and Korean Regimental banners. 1 June 1952. UN Photo #188470 by JD.

Section 1.4 Increasing the Role of the General Assembly

The repercussions of the Korean crisis led to a re-evaluation of the UN's role in peacekeeping. It was undoubtedly the Korean experience that prompted the United States to seek to enhance the role of the General Assembly to maintain international peace and security. At the 1950 session of the General Assembly, the US proposed a draft resolution to empower the Assembly to deal with matters in this field on an emergency basis. It proposed that if the Security Council failed to act because of the lack of unanimity among its Permanent Members, the General Assembly could then vote to act. Despite the strong objection of the Soviet Union, the Assembly adopted this proposal, known as the "Uniting for Peace Resolution," on 3 November 1950.

A general view of the fifty-fourth session of the General Assembly. 20 September 1999. UN Photo # 31534 by Susan Markisz.

Section 1.5 Summary

The Korean crisis and its aftermath highlighted the fact that the Charter provisions on the collective use of force, which were based solely on the agreement between the five superpowers on the Security Council, were not applicable. It highlighted the need for an alternative mechanism to restore peace in case of an outbreak of armed conflict. The United Nations peacekeeping operations were conceived and developed as this alternative mechanism. As further reading will show, PKOs were developed progressively and pragmatically, thanks to the vision and efforts of the successive Secretaries-General and other prominent internationalists, such as Ralph Bunche, Lester B. Pearson, and Brian Urquhart.

Helmet and flak jackets of the members of the 1 parachute battalion of the South African contingent of the United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC). 14 February 2008. UN Photo #185325.

United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Chain of Command

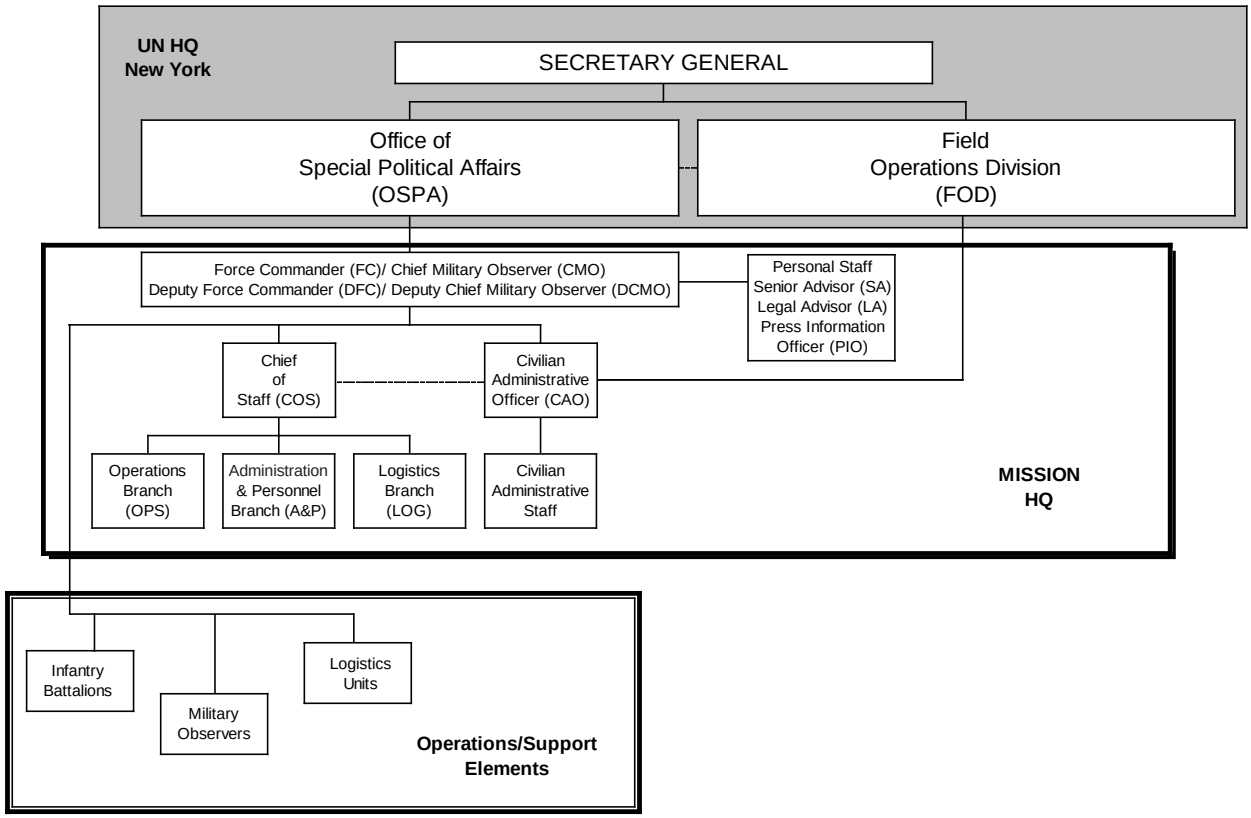


Figure 1.1: "United Nations Peacekeeping Operations Chain of Command" by Sunil Ram.

End-of-Lesson Quiz »

1. On a day-to-day basis, peacekeeping operations are directed by who?

A. The General Assembly
B. The Secretary-General
C. Solely by the Commander of Operations
D. The Security Council

2. The founders of the United Nations had not foreseen the possibility of engaging in what?

A. Peacekeeping operations (PKOs)
B. Conventional warfare
C. Development
D. Reconstruction

3. When a dispute arises between two governments, which one of the following statements is true according to the UN Charter?

A. Parties are not obligated to seek a resolution through any means
B. The Secretary-General establishes guidelines for its resolution under instructions from the General Assembly
C. The Security Council may invoke sanctions to induce parties to seek a peaceful resolution, and may invoke the use of force as a last resort
D. The UN Charter does not address disputes that arise between two governments

4. Peacekeeping operations of the UN are outlined in _____.

A. Chapter VI of the original Charter
B. Chapter VII of the original Charter
C. Chapters VI and VII of the original Charter
D. Not mentioned at all in the original Charter

5. What does Chapter VII of the UN Charter constitute?

A. The core of the UN Collective Security System
B. The secondary role of the Security Council
C. The primary rules of disengagement for the UN system
D. The operating rules for the General Assembly

6. Military personnel who serve on UN peacekeeping operations _____.

A. Are provided only by the five members of the Security Council
B. Always are conscripts who have been drafted by their nation
C. Are permanent employees of the United Nations
D. Are provided by Member States on a voluntary basis

7. Why were the US draft resolutions, that were the basis of the establishment of the United Nations Forces in Korea, adopted by the Security Council?

A. There was full support from all the Permanent Members of the Security Council
B. The US was able to pressure all the members of the Security Council to support the resolutions
C. At the time, the USSR was boycotting the Security Council because of the question of the representation of China at the UN
D. There was no clear understanding of the implications of the resolutions

8. Why was Korea not considered an enforcement operation under Chapter VII of the Charter?

A. It was not under the control of the Security Council
B. It did not have the full agreement of the Security Council
C. It was outside of the scope of the UN Charter as a whole
D. The Secretary-General did not endorse the mission

Answer Key provided on the next page.

End-of-Lesson Quiz »

9. The Korean experience prompted the United States to do what?

A. Retrench its foreign policy and not support the UN

B. Enhance the role of the General Assembly to maintain international peace and security

C. Change the way vetoes worked in the Security Council

D. Modify the role of the Security Council in maintaining international peace

10. The Korean crisis highlighted the need for the United Nations to devise what?

A. An alternative mechanism to restore peace in case of an outbreak of armed conflict

B. A standing military force

C. A re-evaluation of superpower rivalry in the Security Council

D. A reduced role for Permanent Members in the Security Council

Answer Key »

1. B
2. A
3. C
4. D
5. A
6. D
7. C
8. A
9. B
10. A