

## **Introduction**

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Since its founding in 1945 the United Nations has functioned in an era of partitions and proliferating nation states. While some of its defining declarations and conventions were still being discussed, the UN was faced with the challenges of the end of the British mandate in Palestine, and, shortly thereafter, the tumultuous devolution of Pakistan from India. These landmark events signaled the beginning of a wave of decolonization as the number of UN member nations ballooned from 51 at the UN's inception in 1945 to 151 by 1978, and to 193 with the independence of South Sudan in 2011.

With the ending of the Cold War, it seemed the time had come for the United Nations to play a more significant and meaningful role in international politics. The demise of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia challenged the organization's capabilities as the emergence of new states exposed enduring divisions between key UN member states. As was the case in the aftermath of the Second World War, the post-Cold War era left the United Nations struggling with the diplomatic and legal issues associated with the complexities of reconciling self-determination and state sovereignty. Somalia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia presented well-publicized challenges, which highlighted the difficulty of realizing diplomatic consensus in responses to partitions and conflicts.

More recently, in 2011-12 the United Nations was faced with conflict in the very heart of the Middle East as a multitude of forces under the umbrella of the Free Syria Army engaged in an insurrection against the security forces of Bashar al-Asad in a conflict which would become a civil war. Given the divergent interests of its security council, the United Nations was limited to deploying the small UN Supervisory Mission in Syria (UNSMIS) in April of 2012 to monitor a cease fire and buttress the implementation of a six point proposal. Within two months of its inception the UNSMIS was suspended due to increasing violence, and in mid-August the mission was ended less than a week before its mandate was set to expire. As was the case in Bosnia-Herzegovina two decades previously, it seems the United Nations will be limited to a secondary or supporting role in the resolution to the conflict in Syria.

This volume brings together a collection of papers stemming from a conference at Simon Fraser University on the United Nations and the politics of partition. The papers address some of the most significant and enduring conflicts in Southeastern Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia, examining the United Nations' role in and its responses to state partitions. Successes and shortcomings are discussed and lessons are offered by the contributors, as, indeed, the allure of self determination continues to compel nations to strive for statehood.

Emphasizing the legal ramifications of partitions, Edward McWhinney's keynote address warns that partitions are often fraught with negative consequences, pointing out that time is needed to realize durable partitions through negotiations as opposed to imposed arrangements, which may create as many problems as they solve. McWhinney urges states to seek "alternative paradigm-models for federalism" other than the "Anglo-Saxon" model, which may promote more inclusion within the existing nation-state, thus lessening the desire for nations to seek separation.

In his examination of the 1947 Partition Plan for Palestine, Martin Bunton reviews one of the United Nations' best-known resolutions. Tracing the intricacies of the events leading up to the partition plan, Bunton shows how the British failed to reconcile the demands for self determination by the Arab and Jewish communities, leaving the once mighty empire to turn to the nascent United Nations for advice. However, the UN fared no better. The partition of 1947 sliced through the territory, leading directly to war and a complicated and enduring conundrum that has confounded generations of would-be peacemakers.

The United Nations' work in partitioned Palestine receives some vindication in Andrew Theobald's examination of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) during the Israel-Jordan Conflict, 1949-1956. Although the broader political issues were not resolved during this period, Theobald points out that the UNTSO was vital in facilitating communications between enemies whose mutual disregard for each other made face-to-face communication difficult. In addition the UNTSO provided a stabilizing presence in the region. While UN peacekeeping missions are often criticized for their failure to instill peace, they rarely receive accolades for the conflicts they prevent.

Nevertheless, like Israel-Palestine, the island nation of Cyprus remains divided. Christos Ioannides traces the origins of the Cyprus' division to the late colonial period when Great Britain, eager to maintain its hold on the strategic island, granted increased favor to the Turkish minority in an effort to stem the Greek majority's wish for union with Greece. Ioannides argues that British strategies greatly heightened tensions between the Greek and Turkish communities, destroying many of the long standing horizontal relationships and undermining calls for unity against British colonial rule. By the time United Nations Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus (UNFICYP) deployed to Cyprus in 1964, de facto partition had been affected. The island's longstanding mosaic of Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities was further shattered in 1974 following the landing of Turkish troops on the northern shores of the island, creating mass displacement and divisions which persist to the present.

After almost five decades of peacekeeping and rounds of negotiations, a peace settlement for Cyprus continues to elude the United Nations. Andreas Theophanous and Odysseas Christou's assessment of the UN in Cyprus explains that the gap between two sides has only widened since the rejection of the UN plan (Annan V) in the referendum of

April 24, 2009. The original contradiction of the United Nations' own core principles plays out on Cyprus as Turkish Cypriot desire for self-determination conflicts with Greek Cypriot calls for the affirmation of sovereignty. The UN may yet play a role in the resolution of the Cyprus conflict; nevertheless, the authors maintain that a successful arrangement will have to represent a recognizable improvement in the status quo for both communities.

The question of the United Nations' relevance in long standing disputes is further examined in Neera Chandhoke's contribution on the UN involvement in Kashmir. According to Chandhoke, the pessimistic response to the question would be "no", owing to the unresolved conflict and the UN's failure to demilitarize Kashmir. More recent clashes between India and Pakistan over the region have been resolved thanks to American rather than UN pressure. Another approach to the question provokes cautious optimism. Chandhoke reminds us that the United Nations demonstrated considerable leadership during the decolonization era, limiting the principle of self-determination to the independence of a given country from colonial power and not sanctioning further secessionist initiatives. Chandhoke calls for a reinterpretation of self-determination by the United Nations, which would safeguard the rights of individuals and have the UN move from being a broker and keeper of peace to more of an enforcer of justice.

Partition, as David Kanin reminds us, is currently "in bad odor" within the international community, due to Western teleology, the Helsinki Accords, and the notion that "Europe" has learned from its past. While making it clear he does not advocate partition, Kanin notes that partition remains one of many possible means for resolving disputes. In the former Yugoslavia, the past two decades have seen successive territorial partitions that have been poorly managed by the International Community. The specter of unresolved grievances and the looming "Albanian Question" indicate that there may be further partitions in store for the region's future. Partition has long been a part of European history and it may continue to be, and not only in Europe's south and east.

A lack of resolution provides a common thread between the cases examined in this volume, all of which have involved the United Nations for decades. While the shortcomings of the UN are apparently numerous, none of the authors advocates the replacement of the UN. It must be remembered that while not resolved, the conflicts arising from partitions have been contained. What is more, in the highly globalized early twenty-first century, the United Nations may yet have a role to play in facilitating mutually acceptable agreements, which will transcend zero sum struggles. The challenges will be considerable, but a world with the United Nations is likely much safer than a world without it, a point worth considering as we mark the centenary of the war that destroyed the last age of globalization.