

War in Syria: Is Peace-keeping Relevant?

Georgia Apostolaki

IEIP Working Papers, 2/2017

March 2017



**Institute of European
Integration and Policy**
42-44, Aiolou str.
105 60 Athens

War in Syria: Is Peace-keeping Relevant?

Georgia Apostolaki

Translator & MA in European and International Relations

IEIP Working Papers, 2/2017

Copyright © 2017
Institute of European Integration and Policy

42-44, Aiolou str., 105 60 Athens
Tel: +30 210 368 8945, +30 210 368 8963
e-mail: info-eeep@pspa.uoa.gr



2017 marks the 6th the anniversary of the Syrian conflict. Although so many years have passed, the crisis only grows stronger, while the main international organization that is responsible for maintaining international peace and security, namely the United Nations (UN), is unable to help. The main reason is (inter alia) the inability of the UN Security Council (UN SC) to effectively address the war in Syria and the resulting humanitarian crisis. As a consequence, the events that unfold refer to the return of a new Cold War era in terms of UNSC's involvement in conflicts and crisis. This articles examines if a deployment of a peace-keeping mission, a concept that was born because of similar UNSC dead-ends, can help contain and finally end the Syrian conflict.

Today, UN face a great threat; its credibility as an effective means of conflict resolution and an organization dedicated to international peace and security hanging at the balance, because of its inability to contain the war in Syria. As the warring parties in Syria circumvent the rules of international law and the UN Charter, all weapons and means are available at their disposal. The world has witnessed in horror the use of chemical weapons (UN, 2013:5), decapitation of war prisoners (Malik, 2014), torture (Sommerville, 2015) and the assassination of non-combatant (Black, 2016). In other words, the rules of conduct are being bended, resulting into a brutal war that ignores any international convention and years of peace evolution and culture. One should always keep in mind what were the consequences of uncontrolled warfare in the modern world, especially during World War I and II, with the extended use of chemical weapons and reaffirming genocide as an effective tool of war. Most importantly, international and regional organizations were created on the very need to avoid the atrocities of the past, as stated both in the preamble of the UN Charter (UN, 1973:2) and the Treaty of Rome that laid the foundations for today's European Union (EU, 1957:2).

In times like this, it is deemed useful to look closer at the UN practices during the Cold War. Just as then, a multi-level proxy war is in full development in Syria, between Russia and USA, Sunnis and Alawites, Saudi Arabia/Turkey and Iran (The Economist, 2016:9). As then, the UNSC is paralyzed by the use of Russia's veto powers (Black, 2014), in complete contrast with the 1990's period, during which Russia agreed on (or at least did not obstruct) the deployment of UN peace operations , for instance, the

deployment of UNMIK in Kosovo (Weymouth and Henig, 2001:257). This shift marks a new period in Russia's struggle to affirm its position as a great power (Courtney and Jensen, 2016). It is then deemed necessary to examine closely the solutions implemented during the Cold War. The author strongly believes that the best chance for the termination of the hostilities in Syria lies in a peace-keeping operation. Indeed, peace-keeping was invented in order to circumvent the dead-lock of the UN SC, because of the rivalry between USA and the Soviet Union (Berdal, 2010:178-179). The very sense of peace-keeping includes mitigation and containment of the conflict and creating a stable environment for the warring parties to negotiate a peace settlement (Antonopoulos, 2010:69).

Peace-keeping might be a viable and realist solution for the Syrian War. But why? Firstly, one of the principles of peacekeeping is that of consent; all the warring parties must agree to the deployment of a UN present on the ground (Berdal, 2010:180). Assad's regime might object to the idea, which is why Russia's role as a negotiator and close ally to the regime is integral and needed, so as to assure the government's consent. The advantages of this strategy are twofold: firstly, Assad's regime agrees to deploy a UN force in Syrian soil, thus agreeing to an UN-monitored cease fire and the cessation of the warfare, and secondly, Russia is given the chance to take over a leading role and participate in the negotiations, not as a pariah of the international system that acts irrationally and unilaterally, but as a key player within the UN. In other words, Russia is given the attention and importance it seeks through the legitimacy and multilateralism, and not being excluded (Courtney and Jensen, 2016).

The main obstacle that concerns the principle of consent is the presence of the so-called Islamic State of Syria and Iraq (hereinafter ISIS). ISIS is only seen as a terrorist group that must be stopped (UNSC, 2015). As a matter of fact, US administration includes ISIS among the foreign terrorist organizations since 2004 (US Department of State, 2016). But the exclusion of ISIS from peace talks bears a worrying resemblance to the peace talks between the warring parties in Afghanistan, after the 2001 US-led invasion. The Taliban tribes were excluded and did not participate in the peace arrangements (Ishizuka, 2007:2). The result was to become even more radicalized and resolve to violence. The same effect was evident in Iraq after the US-led invasion in 2003. Members of the Ba'ath party were fired from civil service, discharged from the

army and excluded from all the institutional organs (Lacher, 2007: 242-243, Dobbins et al., 2005:191, International Peace Academy, 2003:6, Chandler, 2006:25 and Doge in Jeffrey, 2007:459). This policy led them to resolve to violence and attack the international presence in Iraq and taking responsibility for the assassination of the Secretary-General's special representative in Iraq in August 2003 and several members of his team (United Nations, 2003:22). So, it is paramount to at least consider if the members of the Islamic State should participate in the negotiations.

Another principle of peace-keeping is the minimum use of force (Berdal, 2010:180). The military personnel of a peace-keeping operation is lightly armed and is authorized to use force only in cases of self-defense, because the mission in its very core concerns the separation of the warring parties and the supervision of ceasefire and buffer zones (ibid.,180-181). This characteristic would permit the deployment of troops on the ground that several states object to, as several states are to contribute troops and technical support, thus minimizing the costs and commitment of only one State in cases of unilateral actions. In the case of Syria, US administration supports the anti-government groups, by providing air support and technical assistance (BBC, 2015). Having had the past examples of Afghanistan and Iraq, the US administration tries to abstain from any action that would involve US troops on the ground on foreign soil (Dokos, 2013:12). This is why a lightly-armed, multinational peace-keeping mission might be the answer.

Moreover, peace-keeping operations are characterized of neutrality (Berdal, 2010:183), meaning that the force cannot take sides and, by extension, cannot participate in the conflict. With a polarized conflict, such as this in Syria, it would be extremely dangerous to deploy any UN force that would pick a side, as this would legitimate the struggle of one warring party in the expense of the other and could trigger a chain of events that can even lead to a full-scale world war. So in that sense, an operation under Chapter 7 is not a suitable option. In any case, picking a side is a very tricky business in the Syrian conflict. As the Economist has rightly observed, “Syria is a nasty complex of wars within a war”: the Assad regime against the anti-government forces, the battle between Sunnis and Shias, the proxy war between Russia and USA and the Kurdish struggle for independence (The Economist, 2016:9). Who can tell which side

is correct and how can anyone pick a side without tempering with the delicate balances that hold the status quo and preventing the situation from getting even worse?

As practice has shown, peacekeeping operations are often enhanced with several other activities that can contribute to the consolidation of peace (Bellamy et al, 2007:236). The UN troops and staff are often responsible for delivering humanitarian relief or/and monitor the commencement of elections (Berdal, 2010:190-191). But most importantly, a UN peace-keeping operation can lay the foundations of peace through the deployment of peace-building activities. Peace-building, as defined by UN Secretary Generals (hereinafter SG) (Boutros-Ghali, 1992, 1995 and Annan, 2005), is a post-conflict activity, dedicated to the consolidation of peace and the prevention of conflict resurgence. Measures either cover interstate or intrastate conflicts and address issues of security, state-building and economic development through a democratization. Peace-building can only be deployed after the consent of the parties to the conflict and several participants can help the UN effort, from regional organizations, ad hoc State groups to NGOs and UN specialized agencies. As in every other interstate war, the combatants in Syria will have to learn to live together after the termination of the war, a fact that is today deemed an impossible scenario without the implementation of measures that can consolidate the peace and reconcile the warring parties. Covering a wide range of activities, peace-building can help the Syrian people disarm ex-combatants, rebuild destroyed cities and crucial infrastructure and lay the foundations of economic development.

On the other hand, there are several arguments that suggest peace-building can interfere with the development of a state and impose a certain way of state-building and –reconstruction (Schellhaas and Seegers, 2010:11 and Bellamy et al., 2007:246-249). As Paris (2004:40-49) argues, especially in the 1990's, the international community was rooting for the liberal thesis that advocated that democratization and economic liberalization together are the main ingredients that can help state recovering from civil war. But the record shows that the liberal thesis did not lay the necessary foundations as to prevent the resurgence of war. In several cases, economic liberalization even worsened the financial situation and deepened the chasm between the warring parties, such as the cases of Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala, where the emphasis on economic liberalization deepened the gap between the gap between

the rich and the poor and aggravated the main source of the conflict, namely, economic inequality (ibid.,112-134). Peace-builders can help the Syrian state without forcing a specific model or theory of state and economy organization, while staying true to the principle of neutrality at every level. In any case, state and economy organization is likely to be decided during the negotiations of the UN-brokered peace talks in Geneva, so peace-building must be deployed after the warring parties have decided the future structure of the Syrian State .

Doubtless, the deployment of a peace-keeping operation is not an easy task and has several disadvantages. It is evident that Russia no longer considers the UN as an organization that can trust and that can make a difference in safeguarding peace and security in Syria, as the country constantly vetoes any draft resolutions concerning Syria in the UNSC, thus rendering a positive vote or even abstention about the deployment of a peace-keeping operation extremely doubtful. Even if Russia is given the chance to act as a great power and take up the role of brokering a peace-keeping operation for Syria, it is extremely doubtful that the Assad regime would give its consent. Recent history has shown that the Syrian government has not allowed humanitarian relief to reach besieged cities (Barnard et al.,2016), let alone permit the deployment of a multinational peace-keeping operation. And secondly, even if the Assad regime does give its consent, it can always take it back any time it deems that the Government does not need the UN force,as President Nasser had done in 1967, requesting the withdraw of UNEF (Berdal,2010:181).

In the case that the regime withdraws its consent and Russia demands the withdrawal of the UN force, the US and its allies may use a powerful tool that seems to be forgotten and was developed during the Cold War; the 377 General Assembly Resolution, in other words, the United for Peace Resolution. This revolutionary resolution permits the General Assembly to take over a matter that has been previously in the agenda of the UNSC, when the latter has reached a standstill (Mani, 2010:309). This tool might be extremely useful in Syria and acquiring the necessary majority from the 192 Member-States to invoke the resolution might as well be feasible, because the number of states affected by the Syrian crisis, and especially by the Syrian immigration waves are many and if the war continues, not only will this number grow, but the consequences of mass immigration would be unpredictable and dangerous, as well.

Another crucial problem that must be addressed before the deployment of the UN force is the future political status of Syria. History shows that peace-keeping mission often violate article 2 (4) of the UN Charter, namely, the territorial integrity of the state that has agreed to facilitate them (UN, 1973:4). The cases of Cyprus, East-Timor and Kosovo indicate that the UN mission is likely to split the state into distinctive parts, a partition that is meant to be temporary, but may consolidate a status-quo that is almost impossible to change. This might be realized in Syria, as well, although there are several analysts that suggest partition might actually be the only realistic alternative for the future (Stavridis, 2016, Gambill, 2013 and Mendelsohn, 2015). In that case, the peace-keeping operation might as well help to establish fair and equally approved borders for each different group of former combatant (Dobbins et al., 2015:5). But that does not change the fact that UN intervention might be de facto related to state partition and seen as hypocritical, since the Charter is supposed to respect territorial integrity.

Furthermore, one should also consider that UN's involvement in a complicated conflict such as this, would be a matter of days; no-one can predict just how much time is required for a mission to achieve its goals (Paris, 2008:416-417). The issue of time, and by extend, money, is a very delicate one. In the case of the Congo, ONUC was in a sense forced to withdraw, because the ad hoc fund that the UNSC had created for the mission did not yield sufficient funding (Jacobson, 1964:95). Anyone rooting for a peace-keeping mission should keep in mind that it is a very costly and serious commitment. This is why a peace-keeping mission should be accompanied by a resolution enacting Chapter 8 of the UN Charter (UN, 1973:20-21). Previous experience had shown that peace-keeping missions are better deployed with the help of other international and regional organizations. For instance, UNTAES collaborated with OSCE in Croatia in matters of democratization and elections (Dobbins et al., 2005:116) or NATO played an important role in Afghanistan with the deployment of ISAF, mandated by the United Nations (Ishizuka, 2007:12 and NATO, 2015). In the Syrian war, the European Union has every interest in the termination of the conflict, since it receives a large number of asylum applications by Syrian refugees (UNHCR,2016), while the Arab League can seize the opportunity and upgrade its role as a peace mediator and facilitator (Black,2012). In that way, UN can evenly distribute

responsibility and costs at all the relevant organizations and successfully contain the conflict.

It is beyond question that the war in Syria should not be allowed to continue. UN should take up the leading role in resolving this conflict, by bypassing the dead-lock of the UNSC and the Cold War tensions, through the deployment of a peace-keeping operation. Based on the principles of consent, neutrality and minimum use of force, this solution from the Cold war can effectively contain the war in Syria and pave the way to a peace settlement. Furthermore, the peace-keeping mission should be strengthened with the participations of all relevant international and regional organization (for example EU, Arab League), so that the responsibility and costs of such a venture are equally distributed. The mission should be followed by a peace-building operation, in order to lay the foundations for the consolidation of peace and future reconstruction of Syria, while paying attention to the specific developmental needs of the state. UN Member-States that support such as solution should be ready to use every means at their disposal to see this mission successfully through, such as invoking the United for Peace Resolution and should be ready to recognize Russia as a equal partner and peace broker. Last but not least, all world leaders should consider that the only way to eliminate a threat to international peace and security, such as the war in Syria, is through the UN, and not around it.

Bibliographical References

Annan, Kofi. (2005) *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*. New York: United Nations.

Antolopoulos, K. (2007) 'The Peace Operations of the United Nations' in: Dipla, C. and Doussis, E. (eds) *Sixty Years since the Establishment of the United Nations (Εξήντα Χρόνια Από την Ίδρυση των Ηνωμένων Εθνών)*. Athens: I.Sideris Publications. pp.: 70-86. (Original language: Greek)

BBC (2015) 'Islamic State militants 'filmed torturing Syrian boy''. BBC. 1 June 2015. BBC [online]. Available at: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-32957619>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Bellamy, A., Williams, P. and Griffin, S. (2007) *Understanding Peacekeeping*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Berdal, M. (2010) 'The Security Council and Peace-keeping', in: Lowe, V., Roberts, A., Welsh, J. and Zaum, D. (eds.) *The United Nations Security Council and War The Evolution of Thought and Practice since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 175-204.

Bernard, A., Saad, H., and Sengupta, S. (2016) 'Starving Syrians in Madaya Are Denied Aid Amid Political Jockeying' *The New York Times* 10 January 2016. *The New York Times* [online]. Available at: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/11/world/middleeast/syria-starvation-madaya-siege-united-nations.html?_r=1. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Black, I. (2012) 'Syria presents an opportunity for the Arab League to make its presence felt'. *The Guardian*. 31 January 2012. *The Guardian* [online]. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/31/syria-arab-league-united-nations>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Black, I. (2014) 'Russia and China veto UN move to refer Syria to international criminal court'. *The Guardian*. 22 May 2014. *The Guardian* [online]. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/22/russia-china-veto-un-draft-resolution-refer-syria-international-criminal-court>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Black, I. (2016) 'Report on Syria conflict finds 11.5% of population killed or injured'. The Guardian. 11 February 2016. The Guardian [online]. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/11/report-on-syria-conflict-finds-115-of-population-killed-or-injured>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. (1992) *An Agenda for Peace*. New York: United Nations.

Boutros-Ghali, Boutros. (1995) *Supplement to An Agenda For Peace: Position Paper of the Secretary-General on the Occasion of the Fiftieth Anniversary of the United Nations*. New York: United Nations.

Chandler, D. (2004) 'Imposing The 'rule of law': The lessons of BiH for Peacebuilding in Iraq', *International Peacekeeping*, 11:2, pp.312-333.

Choedon, Y. (2010) 'The United Nations Peacebuilding in Kosovo: The Issue of Coordination', *International Studies*, 47:1, pp.41-57.

Courtney, W. and Jensen, D. (2016) 'Russia's Great Power Future'. The RAND Blog. 12th March 2016. RAND [online]. Available at: <http://www.rand.org/blog/2016/03/russias-great-power-future.html>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Dobbins, J., McFinn, J.G., Crane, K., Jones, S.G., Lal, R., Rathmell, A., Swanger, R.m., Timilsina, A. (2005) 'America's Role in Nation-Building. From Germany to Iraq'. RAND Corporation.

Dobbins, J., Gordon, P., and Martini, J. (2015) *A Peace Plan for Syria*. RAND Corporation.

Dobbins, J., Jones, S .G., Crane, K., Rathmell, A., Steele, B., Teltschik, R., Timilsina, A. (2005) 'The UN's Role in Nation-Building. From the Congo to Iraq'. RAND Corporation.

Dodge, T. (2004) 'A Sovereign Iraq?', *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 46:3, pp.39-58.

Dokos, T. (2013) Informational Guide to the Syrian Conflict (Ενημερωτικός Οδηγός για τη Σύγκρουση στη Συρία). Athens: Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) (Original Language: Greek)

European Union (EU) (1957) The Treaty of Rome. Brussels: European Union.

Hearn, S., Kubitschek, A. and Kugel, A. (2014) The United Nations “Peacebuilding Architecture”: Past, Present and Future. New York: New York University.

Hehir, A. (2006) ‘Autonomous province building: Identification Theory and the Failure of UNMIK’, *International Peacekeeping*, 13:2, pp. 200-213.

International Peace Academy (2003) The Future of UN State-Building: Strategic and Operational Challenges and the Legacy of Iraq. New York: Pocantico Conference Center of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.

Ishizuka, K. (2007) Security Issues facing Peace-building in Afghanistan: ‘Is a light-footprint approach a panacea?’. Nineteenth Annual Meeting, June 2007. New York: The Academic Council on the United Nations System.

Jacobson, H.K. (1964) ‘Onuc's Civilian Operations: State-Preserving and State-Building’, *World Politics*, 17:1, pp. 75-107.

Jeffrey, A. (2007) ‘The politics of ‘democratization’: Lessons from Bosnia and Iraq’, *Review of International Political Economy*, 14:3, pp.444-466.

Lacher, W. (2007) ‘Iraq: Exception to, or Epitome of Contemporary Post-conflict Reconstruction?’, *International Peacekeeping*, 14:2, pp.237-250.

Malik, S. (2014) ‘Isis video appears to show hostage Peter Kassig has been killed’. *The Guardian*. 16 November 2014. *The Guardian* [online]. Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/nov/16/isis-beheads-peter-kassig-reports>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Mani, R. (2010) ‘Peaceful Settlement of Disputes and Conflict Prevention’, in: Lowe, V., Roberts, A., Welsh, J. and Zaum, D. (eds.) *The United Nations Security Council and War The Evolution of Thought and Practice since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp. 300-322.

Mendelsohn, B. (2015) 'Divide and Conquer in Syria and Iraq'. Foreign Affairs. 29 November 2015. Foreign Affairs [online]. Available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/turkey/2015-11-29/divide-and-conquer-syria-and-iraq>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

North Atlantic Treaty Organization (N.A.T.O) (2016) ISAF's mission in Afghanistan (2001-2014) (Archived). Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69366.htm. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Paris, P. (2004) *At War's End. Building Peace after Civil Conflict*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Paris, P. (2008) 'Post-Conflict Peacebuilding', in: Weiss, T.G and Davis, S. (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. pp.404-426.

Schellhaas, C. and Seegers, A. (2009) 'Peacebuilding: Imperialism's New Disguise?', *African Security Review*, 18:2 ,pp. 1-15

Stavridis, J. (2016) 'It's Time to Seriously Consider Partitioning Syria'. *Foreign Policy*. 9 March 2016. Foreign Policy [online]. Available at: <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/03/09/its-time-to-seriously-consider-partitioning-syria/>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

United Nations (UN) (1973) *Charter of the United Nations*. New York: United Nations.

United Nations (UN) (2013) *UN Mission to Investigate Allegations of Use of Chemical Weapons in the Syrian Arab Republic. Report on Alligators of the Use of Chemical Weapons in the Ghouta Area of Damascus on 21 August 2013*. New York: United Nations.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2016) *Facts and Figures about Refugees*. Available at: <http://www.unhcr.ie/about-unhcr/facts-and-figures-about-refugees>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

United Nations Security Council (UNSC) (2015) Resolution 2249 (2015). New York: United Nations.

US Department of State (2016) Foreign Terrorist Organizations. Available at: <http://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/other/des/123085.htm>. (Last accessed: 15 April 2016)

Weymouth, A. and Henig, S. (2001) *The Kosovo Crisis. The Last American war in Europe?* Harlow: Pearson Education Limited