



UNITED NATIONS' PEACE ACTIVITIES

Pace is one of the most cherished goals of the nations of the world. Without peace, it is very difficult to achieve other goals like economic and social progress. Peace became all the more essential as the wars became very destructive and bloody due to development of dangerous weapons in the twentieth century. Moreover, a number of countries and their people are experiencing the negative effects of wars. Hence, leaders of the world joined hands to prevent war and to manage the peaceful relations among the nations. That is the reason why the United Nations was created at the end of Second World War. The United Nations was created to work for peace in all parts of the world. In fact, peace is its top most aim. United Nations is today the most important organisation dedicated to world peace. Many organs of the United Nations work for peace. The efforts of Security Council, the General Assembly and the Secretary General are notable. There have been more than 300 wars after the Second World War. But to the credit of the United Nations, third world war has not occurred.



Objectives

After studying this lesson, you will able to

- identify different ways in which United Nations strives for international peace and security;
- recall the efforts of the United Nations to mediate between countries so that their problems are peacefully settled;
- identify the impact of Cold War in the functioning of the United Nations in regard to peace and security;
- recognise importance of peacekeeping activities of the United Nations;
- explain the sanctions imposed by the United Nations as punishment against peace-violating country;
- explain the significance of disarmament efforts of the United Nations.



31.1 Many Types of Activities

The United Nations role towards world peace had many sides to it. Its organs work to prevent wars from happening. This is done by advising or encouraging countries to maintain friendliest relations without interfering in each other's affairs and to settle differences without using force. For this purpose United Nations has passed several Declarations and Resolutions. They are not of course binding on member countries, yet they have moral weight. However, regrettably, countries went to wars. On such occasions the United Nations worked hard to stop such wars as quickly as possible. For example, when India and Pakistan fought a war over Jammu and Kashmir in 1947, United Nations successfully persuaded both countries to stop that war. On the other hand, United Nations activities recognised need to strengthen conditions of peace through control or elimination of dangerous weapons. There are four main aspects of the United Nations activities which have made our world somewhat peaceful. They are : (1) mediation activities to help countries to reach an agreement, without using armed forces; (2) Peacekeeping activities to keep warring nations apart and restore peace without firing a shot; (3) Permitting some member countries to forcibly intervene in a troubled area and restore peace in an area; (4) Disarmament activities aimed at reducing or totally prohibiting tools of war like landmines, chemical weapons etc. It is important to learn more about each of these four peace activities of the United Nations.

31.2 Mediation Activities

The United Nations has played the role of mediator in dozens of conflicts, sometimes successfully and at other times not so successfully.

Mediation is an activity undertaken by a country or an organization or individual to help resolve a problem. The mediator is not directly connected to the dispute or problem. The mediator has to be friendly and impartial with the quarrelling countries. The mediation starts only when parties to a problem agree. The mediator aims to bring parties face to face for talks or help them in identifying areas of agreement. It is a painstaking and skilled job for which United Nations has gained much experience.

The UN Security Council sent mediators in 1950s to solve the Kashmir problem amicably but the efforts were not fruitful. The Cuban Missile crisis of 1962 is a good example where the Secretary General U Thant's mediation helped to avoid direct military confrontation between the United States and the former Soviet Union. In 1987, United Nations successfully, mediated to get an accord signed for the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan. Similar mediation was undertaken successfully on Cambodia problem in 1991. There are nearly two dozen UN mediators presently helping resolution of problems in Somalia, Cyprus, Western Sahara etc.

The United Nations also helped in fact finding or impartial investigations into border violations, use of banned weapons, and other complaints. With regards to Arab-Israeli conflict, United Nations suggested in 1967 an outline for a settlement that recognised the rights of both Israel and Palestine to live in secure boundaries. At times, the judicial organ, the World Court also contributed to peace through its judgements on complaints brought before it by countries. For example in 2003 the Court ruled against Israel's construction of a wall in occupied Palestinian territories as illegal and provocative. The General Assembly later called upon Israel to adhere to the Court's opinion.



31.3 Binding Sanctions

The United Nations has always preferred to try first non-binding persuasive methods to keep peace among nations. It does not mean that United Nations cannot do, or has not done, any thing in case countries ignore the advice of the United Nations and become a threat to world peace. As you have already learnt in lesson 30, the Security Council has the power to impose 'sanctions' against a threatening country or government so that peace is restored without the need for armed/military action. These 'non-military sanctions', when decided by the Security Council are to be compulsorily implemented by all member countries of the United Nations.

'Sanctions' are strong steps taken to isolate and punish a country that becomes a menace to peace. Sanctions do not mean use of military force. Security Council's non-military sanctions could mean cutting off of diplomatic relations between the targeted country and the rest of the world, curbing sale of arms and ammunition, banning imports and exports of any and all items like oil, medicines etc., freezing of bank deposits in foreign countries. These steps are aimed to ensure that the target country stops its objectionable activity.

United Nations has imposed the binding non-military sanctions some 25 times so far. One of the first cases of such sanctions occurred against South Africa. South Africa refused to abide by the repeated advice of the international community to end its policy of racial discrimination against the Blacks, the Indians and coloured people residing in that country. A compulsory ban on supply of weapons was imposed in 1977 to compel South Africa to end its policy of racial discrimination. Other methods like banning from international sports were also used. South Africa finally had to bow to the wishes of the world when it ended its racial discrimination- apartheid - in 1994. In one of the remarkable instances, United Nations imposed wide ranging sanctions against Iraq which attacked and occupied neighbouring Kuwait in 1990. Sale and purchase of oil was prohibited, food and other essential needs were denied, communication and transport links were cut and accounts in foreign banks were sealed. These actions had a major impact on Iraq and its people for a very long time. Similarly United Nations launched sanctions against many terrorist organisations to deny them any funding. This step was taken after the terrorist attacks against the United States of America in September 11, 2001. Let us however, remember that United Nations sanctions against wrong doers have not achieved the desired results always. It seems terrorists continue to get funds secretly inspite of sanctions.



Intext Questions 31.1

True or False :

1. United Nations is today the most important organisation dedicated to world peace. (True/False)
2. United Nations declarations and resolutions, urging the member countries to solve the dispute by peaceful means have binding effect. (True/False)
3. The UN mediator can expect to have little success unless he enjoys the confidence of all parties. (True/False)
4. In 2003 the International Court of Justice ruled against Israel's construction of a wall in occupied Palestinian territories as illegal and provocative. (True/False)
5. The 'non-military sanctions' imposed by the Security Council are not compulsorily implemented by all member countries of the United Nations. (True/False)



31.4 Authorisation for military action

The goal of world peace is so important for the United Nations that the founders did not hesitate to empower this organisation to use military force to stop and reverse invasions by one country against another country. For this purpose, United Nations was to be equipped with a standing army consisting of troops, contributed by member countries. This army designed to fight aggressor countries under the control of the United Nations and its Secretary General - could not become a reality. The strong countries like United States and the then Soviet Union had serious disagreements on the matter. Hence, even after more than five decades of its existence, the United Nations does not have its own military force to take military action against an aggressor country. Because of this limitation United Nations could not take military action against invading countries independently or automatically.

Moreover due to the cold war between the United States and the former Soviet Union, the members of the United Nations could not reach to an agreement on identifying the aggressor. Often, the two cold war rivals which are permanent members of the Security Council supported the parties to the dispute and prevented action against their allies with the help of veto power. Thus the Security Council remained deadlocked most of the time during the cold war. And yet the UN authorised or permitted one or groups of member countries to take military action on its behalf. Though less than satisfactory, this was a practical option exercised on occasions such as Korea in 1950.

United Nations authorised military action happened in 1950 after North Korea armed forces crossed over to South Korea and refused to go back. The United States was willing and prepared to get militarily involved, along with its allies to defend South Korea, for its own reasons. The United Nations simply endorsed the American intention and authorised a military action to push back North Korea from the territory of South Korea. The United States, using the UN flag, somehow succeeded in restoring South Korea's freedom from North Korean invasion.

Nearly forty years later, United Nations got another opportunity to give similar authorisation to the United States and its allies to use military force to push Iraqi army out of Kuwait. Thus followed the first Gulf war in 1991. It ended with the defeat of Iraq. It is important to remember that the US led Gulf war was the first major war in the new era after the cold war ended.

The end of the US-Soviet cold war was widely expected to help positively the United Nations activities for peace. Unfortunately, those activities came completely under the shadow of the United States. United Nations could not act ignoring the preferences and prejudices of the US which became militarily the strongest country after the cold war. In the midst of new threats to peace like civil or ethnic wars in Liberia, Somalia, Former Yugoslavia, United Nations turned to United States or its allies to send troops. On ten occasions, UN authorised use of force after the first Gulf war. United States was permitted to lead multinational military forces in Somalia (1992), Bosnia (1993), Haiti (1994) and Liberia (2003). Besides, Australia and France also got UN permission to send forces to restore order in East Timor and Rwanda respectively. Nevertheless, many questions have come up about the wisdom of such military activities. Indeed the fair name of the United Nations has been affected. Therefore, United Nations is more cautious to allow military action under its name. The United Nations refused to grant US request for permission to



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wage another war against Iraq in 2003. It is different matter that United States went ahead with its war plans without having the benefit of UN permission.

31.5 Peacekeeping Activities

Compared to the military authorisations, peacekeeping is a remarkable contribution of the United Nations towards world peace. This important activity, in fact, was not anticipated when the United Nations was founded. However, UN tried with this technique right from its early years. The first UN peacekeeping activity started in 1948 when UN dispatched a small team of military observers to ensure peace after the first Arab-Israeli war. Since then, in all there have been 60 peacekeeping operations dispatched by United Nations to restore or maintain peace in countries located in four continents -Africa, Asia, Europe and South America. Two such operations restored peace between India and Pakistan.

United Nations Military Observer Groups in India and Pakistan (UNOGIP) was established in January 1949 after the major conflict between the two countries over Kashmir issue. The observers are continuing to the present time. United Nations India Pakistan Observation Mission (UNIPOM) was established in September 1965 after the war between India and Pakistan and continued until March 1966.

In UN peacekeeping activity there are some notable turning points. For example, in 1956, a 6,000 strong force called United Nations Emergency Force could arrange, without firing a shot, withdrawal of foreign troops from Egypt. In 1960 a much larger peacekeeping force ensured that a newly independent country remained secure from foreign intervention and internal disintegration. In 1993, an equally big operation took over administration of Cambodia and installed democratically elected government there. The end of cold war in 1990 witnessed rapid rise in the number of peacekeeping activities launched. Some were very successful, while others faced difficulties. The examples of failed peacekeeping operations were in former Yugoslavia, Somalia and Rwanda. The overall worth of the UN peacekeeping was demonstrated when in 1988 this activity received Nobel peace prize.

United Nations Peacekeeping operations consist of impartial military and civilian personnel from different countries working under the UN command. Their main job is to nonviolently stop the warring countries from fighting and help them observe the cease-fire agreement reached between them. They create an atmosphere for the warring nations could resolve their differences. Usually they are sent to help control and resolve conflict between hostile states and sometimes between hostile communities within a single state. The UN peacekeeping forces carry light arms and are allowed to use minimum force only if they are attacked.



Intext Questions 31.2

Fill in the blanks :

1. For maintenance of peace and security, United Nations was to be equipped with a _____ contributed by member countries.
2. The United Nations authorised the _____ to act militarily against North Korea.
3. The United Nations _____ to grant US request for permission to wage another war

against Iraq in 2003.

4. There have been around _____ peacekeeping operations dispatched by United Nations to restore or maintain peace in various countries in the world.
5. In 1993, a big operation took over administration of _____.

31.8 Disarmament Activities

It was thought that the production and stockpiling of weapons of mass destruction would ensure peace by deterring the opponent. Far from securing peace these weapons have made the world a dangerous place to live in. Nuclear and other dangerous weapons threaten the very survival of mankind. If full-fledged nuclear war breaks out, it is not only the population of the warring countries that would die but also the rest of the population spread over the globe would suffer. Those who survive the nuclear war would die a slow and painful death. Thus, the preservation of life on the planet is the first and foremost consideration for disarmament. Equally important, disarmament offers the possibility of diverting huge funds from the arms production for improving the living conditions of the poor and needy people of the world.

Right from the inception, the United Nations has taken active interest in disarmament. Several disarmament treaties resulted from UN efforts. Some of them are no doubt controversial. For example Treaty on the Non-proliferation (NPT) of Nuclear Weapons of 1968. This treaty required non-nuclear states not to acquire nuclear weapons, while leaving the nuclear weapon powers free to increase their stocks. Many countries like India refused to sign the treaty to protest against the discrimination.

The UN General Assembly convened three special sessions to focus world attention on the need for disarmament. Those sessions, mobilised world opinion to press reduction of nuclear and conventional weapons. But no concrete results were evident, because of cold war tensions.

The ending of the Cold War raised hopes of serious moves to control and reduce nuclear and other weapons of mass destructions (WMDs). The General Assembly adopted a text of resolution of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in September 1996. The chances of CTBT coming into force are considered remote because many countries, including India, described it a defective treaty and refused to sign it until the five nuclear powers had disarmed.

On the positive side, UN efforts in disarmament led to banning of landmines (1997) and prohibition and destruction of existing stocks of chemical weapons under international supervision (1993). UN also made progress in actually removing several lakhs of landmines in Asia and Africa, supervising elimination of existing stocks of chemical weapons. Also UN played its part in destruction of chemical and biological weapons of Iraq in 1990s.



Intext Questions 31.3

Fill in the blanks :

1. The _____ arms have made the earth a dangerous place to live in.



OPTIONAL MODULE-1

World Order and the United Nations



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2. The preservation of life on the planet is the first and foremost reason behind the need for _____ arms race means diversion of _____ which could be used for economic development.
3. Discriminated between nuclear and non-nuclear weapon countries.
4. General Assembly held _____ special setting on disarmament.
5. UN General Assembly approved The Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in _____.



What Have You Learnt

World peace is the top most aim of the United Nations. The United Nations continues to take up various activities to this end. The United Nations has offered its services as a mediator in dozens of conflicts, sometimes successfully and other times not so successfully. The United Nations has always preferred to try first non-binding persuasive methods to keep peace among nations. It does not mean that United Nations cannot do, or has not done, any thing in case countries ignore the advice of the United Nations and become a threat to world peace. The goal of world peace is so important for the United Nations that the founders did not hesitate to empower this organisation to use military force to stop and reverse foreign invasions against any member country. More than any other activity of the United Nations, peacekeeping is a truly remarkable contribution towards world peace. This important activity, in fact, was not anticipated when the United Nations was founded. However, UN used with this technique right from the beginning of its existence. Some of the peacekeeping operations were very successful, while others faced difficulties. Right from the inception, the United Nations has taken active interest in disarmament. Several disarmament treaties resulted from UN efforts.



Terminal Exercises

1. What are the four main aspects of the United Nations activities which have made our world peaceful?
2. Discuss few of the examples of the United Nations mediation.
3. What are the different types of non-military sanctions which are imposed by the United Nations?
4. Why does the United Nations not have its own military force to carry out its military action?
5. What is peacekeeping? What for these operations have been sent?
6. Discuss some of the aspects in regard to UN disarmament efforts.



Answers to Intext Questions

31.1

1. True



2. False
3. True
4. True
5. False

31.2

1. Standing army
2. United States
3. Iraq
4. 60
5. Cambodia

31.3

1. Nuclear
2. Resources
3. Non-proliferation Treaty
4. Three
5. 1996

Hints for Terminal Exercises

1. Refer to Section 31.1
2. Refer to Section 31.2
3. Refer to Section 31.3
4. Refer to Section 31.4
5. Refer to Section 31.5
6. Refer to Section 31.6