Conflict situations can be resolved in two basic ways: "associative" and "disassociative." The latter relies on military strength and political separation, and is based on the notion that "good fences make good neighbors." Associative solutions, by contrast, involve tearing down walls and joining together. As we have seen, prominent among the causes of war is the existence of feisty, sovereign states that are, by definition, disassociative relative to each other. Associative solutions include heightened reliance on international law, shared ethical norms, and the joining together of otherwise independent countries to form international organizations. As with the other "solutions" considered in this chapter, international organizations are not perfect or foolproof. Although their record is mixed, there is much to applaud in the activities of various international organizations, especially the United Nations, which offers a way of ameliorating—although not eliminating—the often troublesome role of states.

When considering the UN, it is important to recognize what it is not: it is not a world government, because its members retain their sovereignty. Also, it has not proven effective in preventing conflicts among the major powers, because these powers were granted vetoes over any UN-led enforcement activities. However, the UN has been occasionally effective in peacekeeping, and in monitoring compliance with cease-fires and other negotiated settlements, and, often, in mediating disputes that might otherwise have turned violent. The UN also provides a valuable forum for debates in addition to the contribution of its various "functional" agencies (such as the Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Health Organization, UNESCO, UNICEF, etc.), which not only help alleviate much human misery but also help creatively undermine reliance on states as the sole unit of political/economic/social recourse.

Thus, the benefits of the United Nations go beyond simply contributing to "negative peace." It may also represent a partial step in the progression from individualism through to tribalism, to nationalism and then to globalism, a transition that may well be essential if we are ever to give peace a realistic chance. As might be expected, the United Nations is regularly criticized, especially by right-wing militarists and ardent nationalists…which in itself suggests that it may have a major role to play in preventing war!

Regrettably, the UN has been especially unsuccessful in quelling civil wars, such as in Libya or Syria. It also has been notably reluctant—or unable—to intervene in wars of would-be separation, especially when the major powers are directly involved. On the other hand, UN peacekeeping operations, which are the primary focus of the next selection, have in fact achieved far more than is widely appreciated; after all, just as news reports are
unlikely to announce, “War did not break out today between countries X and Y,” people are far more aware of any failures to prevent war than of the numerous successes.

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Article 43

All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security.

—UN Charter

Although peacekeeping is one of the quintessential UN functions, it is mentioned only briefly in the Charter. Its full scope and nature have gradually emerged, through need, as a middle ground between mere arbitration of disputes, on the one hand, and use of armed force, on the other. The Security Council’s first peacekeeping resolution set important precedents, establishing the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO) in 1948 to oversee the truce between Arabs and Jews when the United Kingdom left Palestine. Like peacekeepers today, the UNTSO troops were provided by member states. The troopers wore the blue helmets that have marked UN peacekeepers ever since. UNTSO also set the model for nomenclature: it is invariably referred to by its acronym rather than its full name.

That decades-old practice has led to a roster of past and current operations that read like a chapter out of Genesis, with names that sound like the biblical Gog and Magog—actually, MOONUC and UNOMIG. UNTSO is still in operation, with an expanded mandate that includes supervising the implementation and observance of the general agreements between Israel and its four Arab neighbors.

Once the Security Council authorizes the deployment of an operation, defines its mission, and recommends how it should be carried out, the secretary general appoints a force commander and through the Secretariat’s Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) arranges for management and logistics. Member states are asked to provide personnel, equipment, and logistics. The UN pays member states at the rate of $1,100 per peacekeeper per month, and the governments pay the troops according to their own scales. Member states retain control over their units. Peacekeeping personnel rely less on their arms than on their international authority and their reputation for impartiality. They wear their country’s uniform and are identified as peacekeepers by a UN blue helmet or a beret and a badge.

Some UN peacekeeping operations consist of military observers charged with monitoring truces, troop withdrawals, and borders or demilitarized zones. Other operations involve military formations capable of acting as buffers between hostile forces. More recently, some peacekeeping operations have combined military and police or civilian functions and personnel, with the aim of creating or strengthening political institutions, providing emergency aid, clearing land mines, or administering and monitoring free elections.

Peace-related issues have always been central to Security Council deliberations, but in the past decade they have become especially numerous and demanding of time and resources. The decade of the 1990s saw the UN launch more peace-related operations than in all the previous four decades. During the year ending June 2003, there were 14 peacekeeping missions, employing 45,000 personnel at a cost of $2.6 billion.

And the nature of the disputes has largely changed. The norm used to be that wars occurred between nation-states, which fought with field armies that were supposed to target combatants and not civilians—that was the theory, anyway. But these days nation-states have been remarkably well behaved toward one another, and in some places, like Europe, they have even forged close political ties. Instead, conflicts tend to occur within nations,
in the form of civil wars (as in Rwanda, Congo, and the former Yugoslavia) or national resistance movements (like the East Timorese against Indonesian occupation, the Islamic separatists in the Philippines, the independence fighters in Kosovo, or the Palestinians against the Israelis).

A PEACE GLOSSARY

Just as Eskimos have many words to describe the various kinds of snow, the UN has developed words and phrases for the making and keeping of peace. Here are just a few.

Preventive diplomacy
As its name suggests, preventive diplomacy seeks to head off disputes before they become full-blown conflicts. The UN prefers this kind of diplomacy but is able to apply it in only some instances. The UN employs its extensive contacts and offices around the world to detect early signs of potential threats to international peace and security.

Peacemaking
Peacemaking involves the use of diplomacy to persuade belligerents to stop fighting and negotiate an end to their dispute.

Peace enforcement
Peace enforcement involves the use of force against one of the belligerents to enforce an end to the fighting.

Peacebuilding
Peacebuilding involves helping nations promote peace before, during, or after a conflict. Broadly defined, it employs a wide range of political, humanitarian, and human rights activities and programs.

Many parts of the UN system may join in a peacebuilding effort, as well as private bodies like nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The secretary general often appoints representatives to coordinate the activities through special peacebuilding support offices, such as those established in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, and the Central African Republic.

The responsibility to protect
The Charter gives the UN the right to intervene in a nation’s affairs to prevent egregiously human rights violations, but in recent years there has been talk about a variant on this, called the responsibility to protect. A recent international commission stated in its report that “the responsibility to protect implies an evaluation of the issues from the point of view of those seeking or needing support, rather than those who may be considering intervention.”

THE TALKING CURE

Today, the council has to address so many requests for making or keeping peace that it usually begins by looking for a solution that does not involve a UN deployment. It starts with behind-the-scenes diplomacy, escalating to open diplomacy as needed.

A good example is the conflict between Ethiopia and its breakaway province of Eritrea, which began in the 1990s and has only recently been resolved, largely through UN and regional efforts. During the early 1980s, Ethiopia, a landlocked country, unilaterally annexed Eritrea, which gave it a port on the Red Sea; but the Eritreans resisted and finally secured their independence after a long war. Then, on May 6, 1998, the Eritrean government ordered its armed forces to occupy a slice of disputed territory on the border with Ethiopia. A regional body, the Organization of African Unity (OAU), worked out an agreement for settling the dispute, but neither side would commit to it.

In February 1999, the Security Council stepped in and urged the disputants to accept the OAU’s plan. When they refused and began fighting, the council moved to its next stage of action, which was to tell the combatants to stop fighting, start talking, and arrange a cease-fire. The U.S. also joined the cease-fire efforts, and in February and March OAU special envoy Ahmed Ouayahia (of Algeria) and former U.S. national security advisor Anthony Lake visited Asmara and Addis Ababa. Algeria then brought the two parties together for talks, which broke down.

The fighting had by then stopped but seemed on the verge of resuming when, in April, the council reiterated its demand for a cease-fire and implementation of the OAU’s plan. In June the council again asked the two parties to negotiate, citing a looming humanitarian crisis as drought and unrest threatened massive starvation. The U.S. sent more then 700,000 metric tons of food assistance to Ethiopia and 100,000 to Eritrea. A UN Security Council mission to Congo, led by U.S. permanent representative Richard Holbrooke, began shuttle diplomacy during several days early in May, with Holbrooke leaning on both sides not to renew the fighting.
The shuttle talks failed, the mission left, and on May 12, 2000, Ethiopia sent its forces deep into Eritrea. The Security Council passed a resolution demanding an end to military action, but the next day Ethiopia’s forces made a major breakthrough and eventually advanced to within 100 kilometers of the Eritrean capital. Then the Ethiopian government, apparently satisfied it had acquired a good bargaining position, stated it was ending the war. Meanwhile, the Security Council passed another resolution, 1298, requiring that member states enforce an arms sales embargo on both combatants. Eritrea then declared that it would move its troops back to the border that existed in May 1998.

As each combatant backed off, the OAU, UN, and other parties arranged for new talks in Algiers, which led to an agreement on June 18 for a ceasefire. Once the fighting ended, the council created the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNMEE), charged with monitoring the border and ensuring that the provisions of the ceasefire were honored. The council authorized the mission at a strength of more than 4,200 military and other personnel.

By then, Ethiopia and Eritrea had been fighting or at least glaring at each other for more than two years. Why did the council wait so long? The answer is that UN peacekeepers maintain peace once it is agreed to by the combatants, but they do not create peace through military action. The main purpose of peacekeeping is simply to help prevent fighting from erupting and to give negotiators a chance to find a permanent resolution to the dispute.

A resolution seems to have been found in the Ethiopia-Eritrea border dispute. In fall 2000, the OAU envoy and Anthony Lake pursued shuttle diplomacy while members of the Security Council urged the disputants to negotiate a complete solution. At Algiers in December 2000, the two nations signed a final accord in the presence of secretary general Kofi Annan and U.S. secretary of state Madeleine Albright. The end is in sight but not quite achieved. UNMEE is expected to remain deployed until the final border between the two nations is demarcated, and until the two governments establish sufficient dialogue to ensure that they can peacefully resolve any disagreements or misunderstandings that might arise between them.

UN SANCTIONS

Sanctions are nonlethal, noninvasive mechanisms aimed at preventing a state from interacting with the outside world in certain ways, such as engaging in trade or acquiring arms. Travel bans and financial or diplomatic restrictions are also types of sanction. Although sanctions are intended to pressure governments, they may also unintentionally harm civilians too. Sometimes it is the poorest or most vulnerable members of society who are most harmed when their nation is placed under a sanction, especially one that affects trade and commerce. Consider the case of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq, after the Gulf War.

When Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the UN imposed sweeping sanctions intended to bar the aggressor from all trade and financial dealings, except for humanitarian purposes, with the rest of the world. After the U.S. and its allies, with the blessing of the UN, routed the Iraqi armed forces and arranged a cease-fire (which the UN monitored) in 1991, the UN left the sanctions in place while stipulating that Iraq divest itself of weapons of mass destruction. Because the Iraqi government was not fully cooperating with inspections, the UN continued the sanctions throughout the years of the Saddam Hussein regime.

The Iraqi government, meanwhile, was able to partly evade the sanctions while complaining noisily that its citizens were being deprived of access to vital medicines, food, and other necessities. This effective campaign influenced the Security Council to create the Oil for Food program, which permitted the Iraqi government the option of exporting specified amounts of crude oil, under UN scrutiny, in order to pay for “humanitarian goods.” Terms of the program were liberalized in 1998 and 1999, and finally in 2002, to give Iraq access to most civilian goods. The last liberalization was done through a Security Council resolution offered by the U.S. in May 2002. The idea behind the resolution was to replace typical UN sanctions with “smart sanctions” that would enable Iraqi citizens to get necessities more easily while making it more difficult for Saddam Hussein’s regime to use trade in order to obtain arms and other forbidden items. On May 22, 2003, two
months after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, the Security Council lifted sanctions, except for the sale of weapons and related materiel.

RETHINKING PEACEKEEPING

Although traditional peacekeeping remains important, it is increasingly regarded as merely the first step in a process of moving from armed conflict to political dialogue and engagement. The new approach tries to engage all stakeholders in dialogue, which means governments, of course, but also nongovernmental organizations and other groups. Among the pioneers of the new approach is Kofi Annan, who spent four years in charge of peacekeeping operations when he was undersecretary general, and one of his top aides, Shashi Tharoor. As Tharoor says of his experiences during the 1990s, when the new approach emerged, in addition to doing the usual peacekeeping tasks, they were experimenting with “all sorts of new things, everything from delivering humanitarian aid under fire, hunting down warlords, and of course monitoring no-fly zones. It was very much like fixing the engine of a moving car.”

One of the places where the UN has applied its new thinking about peacekeeping is East Timor, which recently gained national independence from Indonesia. The Security Council hosted the negotiations that led in 1999 to a popular referendum in which the Timorese rejected autonomy within Indonesia and opted for complete independence. But the council had to authorize a multinational security force after Indonesian-backed militants unleashed a campaign of systematic destruction and violence in response to the Timorese referendum. Many East Timorese were killed and more than 200,000 were forced to flee, most of them to West Timor.

In October 1999, acting under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, the Security Council established the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) to restore order and provide administrative services as East Timor prepared for independence. The council appointed Sergio Vieira de Mello of Brazil as the transitional administrator for East Timor. UNTAET began a program of “Timorization” of key government posts to prepare for transition to full independence. In July UNTAET established the East Timor Transitional Administration (ETTA), with a cabinet of nine ministries, five headed by East Timorese. Then UNTAET appointed a thirty-six-member National Council representing a wide spectrum of Timorese society. UNTAET began preparations for elections in late summer 2001 for a national assembly, which drew up and adopted a constitution. In 2002 the Timorese elected a president and became a new nation.

The UN’s nation-building has succeeded in launching East Timor on its new path, but interestingly the effort has gotten mixed reviews. David Malone praises its director: “To make good things happen at the UN requires particular skills and qualities that may not be required in running a major corporation or running a major government. They are particular skills of endurance and determination that I think find expression in Sergio Vieira de Mello, who pulled off the East Timor operation in spite of tremendous problems on the ground and enormous bureaucratic inertia within the UN. He just has the sheer determination to get things done and they did get done.” Shepard Foman concedes that the effort went fairly well but questions whether it was appropriate: “The UN as a government in Kosovo and East Timor is questionable. Few of the people that went out to govern had any more experience than any of the East Timorese. That’s an example of where it [the UN] took on a role to prove itself, and it did an all right job, but we lost a year or so in terms of the Timorese own capacity to develop, to reconstruct.”

Good, bad, or inappropriate, the UN’s mission to East Timor shows that new ideas are floating about and being acted on, which is crucial if the world body is going to adapt and remain vital. Which opens up another area of change: the faces under those blue helmets.

NEW PEACEKEEPERS, NEW FACES

A relic of the colonial era, which didn’t end until the 1970s, is that the Western media tend to present the European-American nations as militarily superior. This is increasingly an outdated notion. David Malone says, “It’s just assumed that the West, because it is so well equipped when it goes into
the peacekeeping concept along lines described above has stretched the peacekeeping effort sometimes beyond what it can handle. Some have likened UN peacekeeping to a volunteer fire department—but it's not that well organized, according to Kofi Annan, because for every mission it is necessary to scrounge up the fire engines and the money to pay for them "before we can start dousing any flames."

The Security Council commissioned a study led by Lakhdar Brahimi, the former foreign minister of Algeria, to examine the main shortcomings of the current operation and offer solutions for change. This so-called Brahimi report, submitted in August 2000, has become a blueprint for such efforts. The report recommends that the UN make fundamental changes in its policies and practices of peacekeeping and that it provide more financial backing. It urges an updating of the concept of peacekeeping to address modern situations where the combatants may be heavily armed and not always obedient to commanders or political leaders. In such highly charged scenarios the peacekeepers may have to choose sides, at least temporarily, in order to protect the innocent. The Security Council must therefore provide peacekeeping missions with precise instructions on how to act in a variety of possible circumstances. Equally important, according to the report, is the integration of military functions with historically civil concerns such as human rights, policing, and food, shelter, and medical services. The UN has begun acting on the report, beginning with the Security Council's acceptance of the report's recommendations. Questions now are whether the General Assembly will deliver adequate financial support and whether the council and the secretariat have the will to follow through on the report over the long term.