

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW  
MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES**  
**[ISSN 2581-5369]**

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**Volume 6 | Issue 3**

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**2023**

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# The Fiasco of the ‘League of Nations’ Which Led to the ‘United Nations’

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## ABSTRACT

*Wars and conflicts were prevalent in the international system before the establishment of international institutions and governments. These organisations were created to provide rationality and bring peace to the world. One of the most catastrophic tragedies in history shook the international system. As Held<sup>1</sup> pointed out, the First World War portrayed a number of issues in the international system that no one country could resolve on its own. The alleviation of the consequences of wars required cooperation between nations. Thus, the atrocities of World War I (1914–18) became the seed for the formation of The League of Nations. The League of Nations, established during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, was the first organisation of sovereign states intended to be global and committed to the resolution of conflicts and the avoidance of war. The League of Nations was discredited because it was unable to employ the lessons of World War I to avert future wars and conflicts, including the Second World War, which resulted in immense losses among both military personnel and civilians. Nevertheless, the League’s inability to avert the Second World War did not quash the idea of the need of a worldwide organisation. Instead, it fostered a will to improve upon previous global institutions in an effort to keep the peace in the future. This paper will look at how these two international groups stack up against one another.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Wars and conflicts were prevalent in the international system before the establishment of international institutions and governments. These organizations were created to provide rationality and bring peace to the world. One of the most catastrophic tragedies in history shook the international system. As Held<sup>2</sup> pointed out, the First World War portrayed a number of issues in the international system that no one country could resolve on its own. The alleviation of the consequences of wars required cooperation between nations. Thus, the atrocities of World War I (1914–18) became the seed for the formation of The League of Nations. The League of Nations, established during the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, was the first organisation of

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<sup>2</sup> Held, David. Reframing Global Governance: Apocalypse Soon or Reform. *New Political Economy*, 11.2, 2006, 158-176.

sovereign states intended to be global and committed to the resolution of conflicts and the avoidance of war. The League of Nations was discredited because it was unable to employ the lessons of World War I to avert future wars and conflicts, including the Second World War, which resulted in immense losses among both military personnel and civilians. Nevertheless, the League's inability to avert the Second World War did not quash the idea of the need of a worldwide organisation. Instead, it fostered a will to improve upon previous global institutions in an effort to keep the peace in the future. This paper will look at how these two international groups stack up against one another.

## **II. CONTRAST BETWEEN THE TWO ORGANISATIONS**

### **(A) Formation**

The League of Nations and the United Nations were both formed under different circumstances. To begin, the fundamental components of the United Nations were formed while world war was still in process, but the Covenant of the League was created after hostilities had concluded. Perhaps the pressing needs during the World War contributed to the United Nations being granted more expansive powers for maintaining peace. Secondly, the Paris Peace Conference where the Covenant was drafted included it in the peace treaty with Germany where it was marked by with divided attention. The connection between the Covenant and the treaty was problematic, and it likely played a role in the United States Senate's refusal to approve the Covenant despite the fact that the two could be ratified independently. Alternatively, the United Nations Charter was created as its own legal document during a conference organized for that specific purpose. Thirdly, Japan, France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, together with nine other allied nations, negotiated the Covenant as a secret agreement. In contrary, the final text of the United Nations Charter was the result of the collaborative efforts of the fifty nations that were represented at the 1945 San Francisco Conference. Consequently, the views of the smaller nations were also taken into account, especially their willingness to give the new organisation broad responsibilities in advancing economic and social cooperation and the independence of colonial peoples.

### **(B) Membership**

Another distinction is that the United Nations has the backing of the world's most powerful nation. The League failed to develop into the worldwide body that had been envisioned to be. Additionally, it was unable to recruit or keep those major powers that were crucial to its success as a tool for maintaining peace. At first, states were concerned about their own interests and the United States followed a policy of non-intervention. This meant that the United States would

not meddle in the affairs of any other countries in the international system. For the League of Nations, this was a major setback since it meant it would no longer receive support from the world's most powerful powers. Even though the League had already shown its inability to curb the aggressive tactics of Germany, Italy, and Japan, the United States did not join, and the Soviet Union did not join the League until 1934. In the 1930s, the three aggressive nations withdrew from the League to pursue their expansionist goals. On the other side, the members of the international system are prepared to fully support and implement UN recommendations. Over one hundred and ninety countries throughout the globe support the United Nations. Due to the fact that the organisation is run by the strong states, it is safe to assume that funding will not be an issue. On the downside, the major powers are using the UN for their own ends.

### **(C) Use of force**

After the first World War, there were rising concerns about a Russian comeback, Britain and France encouraged Germany's rearmament efforts after WWI. The UN may utilize force to resolve crises, unlike the League of Nations. This is because the UN recognises that there comes a point when use of force is the only option left to maintain international peace. For instance, the Egyptian and Libyan governments have been hit with a variety of economic and political sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council. To ensure cooperation in the desert nations, the UN Security Council instituted a no-fly zone policy. Without the ability to use force to restore peace and democracy, the League of Nations was unable to accomplish its goals. The League of Nations, for instance, had prolonged talks with Germany to convince it to abandon its rearmament programme. When it came to getting Germany to follow the organization's principles, the League tried everything but did not resort to violence was seen as an attack on the independence and sovereignty of states. Since the League was not prepared to endorse the concept of "collective security," it could not deploy armed action to punish those that violated international peace.

Additionally, the Charter was intended to rectify several constitutional flaws and omissions in the Covenant, which the founders of the UN thought had been partially responsible for the League's failure to stop the second world war in the 1930s. There was no absolute prohibition on war, the mechanism for resolving disputes between member nations was too onerous, and the League Council was not given enough authority to avert war or end existing conflicts. The Covenant prohibited the use of force to settle disputes between states, but it did not outright forbid states from going to war if they had first presented their disagreements to arbitration, a judiciary, or the Council of the League. After a "cooling-off" period, a side may legitimately resort to war if it believes the other party will not accept the decisions of the negotiating body.

In accordance with the Charter, no country may initiate hostilities under any pretext. Article 51 does protect the right to self-defence, which includes the ability to use force in response to an unlawful armed attack but not to instigate hostilities. In cases when the Security Council deems a "threat to the peace" to exist, it has the authority to call for international intervention<sup>3</sup>. Among them are economic sanctions and military action, both of which are required by all member nations. The United Nations modified certain policies of the defunct League of Nations mostly as a result of the evolution of the international system. World leaders in the international system learned their lesson the hard way during World War II that war had to be avoided at all costs. The threat posed by biological, chemical, and nuclear weapons has highlighted the urgency with which the world must address the issue of global security.

#### **(D) Voting**

The decisions of the League were to be decided by unanimous vote under the Covenant. All members of the League's Assembly and the Council, which was charged with specific responsibility for keeping peace, were subject to this regulation. Except for some procedural issues and a small number of other items, a single "nay" eliminated any resolution that the League considered, giving each member state the power of veto. On the other side, the UN's founders mandated that all decisions be made by a simple majority vote within the organisation. Only permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (currently France, China, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Russian Federation) are favoured by the norm of unanimity. On substantive issues, the votes of all five permanent members of the Security Council are required for a decision to be made.

#### **(E) Promotion of human welfare**

The United Nations Charter not only established a specialised organ, the Economic and Social Council, to oversee the organization's work in the field of international economic and social cooperation based on the respect for the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples, but it also lays down specific injunctions for such cooperation. Non-industrialized member states, the vast majority of which are former colonial territories that joined the international body decades after it was created, have come to rely more on the United Nations and its specialised agencies to help them with their economic and social development. All of these nations' development policies are based mostly on UN initiatives. No meaningful comparison can be made between the two organisations' accomplishments in this area since the

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<sup>3</sup> "Comparison with the League of Nations ." Worldmark Encyclopedia of Nations. . Retrieved November 08, 2022 from Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/comparison-league-nations>

Covenant of the League did not include provisions for a coordinated programme of economic and social cooperation. Nonetheless, the League accomplished a great deal, particularly in its efforts to end the "white slave" trade in which women and children were sold into slavery, to aid refugees, to decrease the flow of opium and other harmful narcotics, and to encourage nations to loosen their grip on international trade.

### **III. SIMILARITIES**

However, there are numerous similarities between the two organisations, such as their underlying structures, goals, and ideology. Their mission was to monitor global stability and eliminate the possibility of conflict. Both international organisations were created after the horrors of the two world wars. Both of these peace institutions sought to provide permanent answers to the causes of conflict. Big assemblies and small councils were the backbone of both the UN and the League of Nations. Members of the council was charged with working together to stop any kind of open hostility through discussion and reason<sup>4</sup>. The United Nations and the League of Nations both advocated the use of peaceful means including judicial processes, negotiation, and arbitration to reduce the possibility of conflict between countries. Moreover, both international bodies maintained permanent secretariats staffed by international civil employees who did not report to their national governments rather to the UN. Since both organizations were established to protect the peace and security of the world community as a whole, preventing war was naturally their first priority. Schneider<sup>5</sup> also points out that the upkeep of international peace was a big challenge for the two organisations. The international system is based on the Hobbesian state of nature, which poses serious challenges for the two organisations. The organisations were established to serve as the Leviathan and to act independently with their power and authority. In this scenario, the international system is still anarchic, and circumstances similar to the state of nature persist.<sup>6</sup>

### **IV. BALANCE SHEET FOR THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS**

The League failed the League's ultimate test. The aggression of the Axis nations (Japan, Germany, and Italy) was not contained, and the League was not able to dissipate the drift toward another world war. A rise in international hostility may be traced back to the 1930s, when economies throughout the globe were in a rapid decline. Germany, Italy, and Japan all fell under

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<sup>4</sup> "Can foreign policy be both 'ethical' and Realist or Discuss the Essay", n.d. Retrieved from <https://studentshare.org/history/1461169-can-foreign-policy-be-both-ychethicallyie-and>

<sup>5</sup> Schneider, Peter. *The Wall Jumper*. Chicago: University of Chicago press, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> IvyPanda. (2022, July 23). Similarities Between League of Nations and United Nations. <https://ivypanda.com/essays/comparison-of-the-league-of-nations-and-the-united-nations/>

the control of fascist dictatorships that were dedicated to expanding their empires at whatever cost, therefore they refused to join the League of Nations. Japan took control of Manchuria in 1932. The League took exception to this but could do nothing about it. Japan abandoned the League once the League began supporting China. Hitler declared in 1932 that Germany would no longer be a member of the League. Abyssinia was invaded by Italy in 1935. Despite the League's condemnation of Italy, France and Britain were caught in a backroom deal to hand up Abyssinia to the Italy. After 1935, the League's influence had been eroded by these crises, and it was no longer able to restrain Germany. The Sudeten crisis of 1938 occurred at a time when Britain and France had stopped paying attention to the League. It did impose economic sanctions on Italy, a permanent member of the Council, for its wanton invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, but the support was half hearted and the action failed. Japan, another permanent member of the League's Council, launched an aggressive war against China in defiance of the Council and the Assembly. Even though Germany was a permanent member of the Council, the League was powerless to prevent its illegal reoccupation of the Rhineland in 1936. Similarly, the League could do little more than issue protests against German and Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War. Each of these setbacks, taken together, reinforced Hitler's conviction that the League and its surviving major members were powerless. While the world was on the brink of war in the summer of 1939 and Hitler's army marched into Poland that same year, yet no member of the League of Nations convened a meeting of the League's Council or Assembly.

However, the League's record in political matters was not entirely bad. For instance, it was able to resolve the "dangerous conflicts between Poland and Germany over Upper Silesia and between Germany, Poland, and Lithuania over Memel", as well as the frontier controversy between Albania, Greece, and Yugoslavia, and the potentially explosive border situation between Greece and Bulgaria. A border dispute between Czechoslovakia and Poland was resolved by the League's Permanent Court of International Justice, as were disputes between the United Kingdom and Turkey over the Mosul area and the "United Kingdom and France over the nationality of Maltese residents in the French protectorates of Morocco and Tunisia. War between Peru and Colombia over" the upper Amazon basin was averted thanks to the League's intervention.

Along with these successful peacekeeping operations, the League was also responsible for managing the Free City of Danzig and the Saar Territory, and it provided financial aid to the restoration of several governments, most notably Austria. Effective humanitarian efforts were also taken out by the League. The organization's non-political operations continued throughout WWII, and its secretariat laid the groundwork for the United Nations. It took another five

months after the creation of the new international organisation before the League of Nations was formally abolished in April 1946.

## **V. THE UNITED NATIONS' GREATER SCOPE**

Both the United Nations' jurisdiction and its duties are much more comprehensive than the League's were. Only three of the UN agencies predate the UN itself; they are the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), and the United Nations University (UPU). However, the League has never funded any projects similar to the United Nations' Development Program, United Nations Environment Program, or World Food Program. The Permanent Court of Justice was not a requirement for League membership, but the UN Charter makes all UN members parties to the International Court of Justice Statute. It is true that the United Nations, like the League, has had some notable accomplishments in ending local violent confrontations and the development of disputes. These include the cases of the Congo, Kashmir, and Cyprus. However, the UN has repeatedly failed in a variety of global contexts, largely due to the right to veto at the disposal of five countries, and has repeatedly proven unable to take effective action in any situation where the interests of either the United States or the former USSR are closely involved. As a result, it failed to prevent the Soviet invasions of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, to stop the bloodshed that plagued Indochina for much of its existence, and to find a lasting solution to the protracted dilemma that has periodically erupted in wars between the Arabs and Israel.

### **(A) Israeli occupation (1948-Now)**

Palestinians have been battling what a United Nations investigator called "ethnic cleansing" by Israel since the Jewish state was established in 1948. Between 1947 and 1949, at least 15,000 Palestinians were killed, and around 750,000 (out of a total population of 1.9 million) were pushed to claim refuge in other places. So far, the violence has claimed the lives of almost 7,000 Palestinians and 1,100 Israelis. Israel now governs around 85% of the land that was formerly Palestine. It also continues to build illegal settlements on occupied areas and maintains a punishing embargo on Gaza despite several UN resolutions demanding it stop. Multiple resolutions passed by the United Nations Security Council have denounced Israel for its use of force against Palestinian civilians, but the United States has used its veto power to oppose these measures.

### **(B) Kashmir dispute (1948-Now)**

Wanton executions, rape, imprisonment of leaders and activists, torture, and disappearances of Kashmiris have highlighted the continuing struggle in the disputed Kashmir area as one of the



biggest human rights disasters in history, despite many unimplemented UN resolutions on the matter. After achieving independence from the British in 1947, both India and Pakistan laid claim to the whole mountainous territory. Since 1989, a number of Muslim insurgent organisations in Indian-controlled Kashmir have gained ground in their fight for either independence from India or unification with Pakistan. As many as 68,000 individuals have been assassinated by Indian authorities since then.

**(C) Somali civil war (1991-Now)**

Somalia's civil conflict has been going on for decades, since the Somali Rebellion overthrew ruler Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991. UNOSOM, a peacekeeping force established by the United Nations in December 1992 to help people besieged by civil conflict and starvation, has subsequently failed due to a lack of government to communicate with and frequent assaults against UN troops. It is estimated that half a million people in the nation died as a direct result of the failure of the UN peacekeeping effort.

**(D) Rwandan civil war (1994):**

The civil war between the Rwandan Armed Forces and the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) lasted from 1990 to 1994, and it is often considered to be one of the deadliest ethnic genocides since World War II. To avoid international intervention, the Hutu-dominated administration at the time murdered 10 UN peacekeepers in 1994. Over the course of only three months, Hutus killed 800,000 Tutsis and raped about 250,000 women in Rwanda, all while UN forces either left the victims to their fate or stood by indifferently as the atrocities unfolded.

**(E) Syrian civil war (2011-Now):**

Pro-democracy protestors in Syria were met with a harsh crackdown by the Assad administration in March 2011, with President Bashar al-Assad vowing to "relentlessly fight terrorist groups." Prisoned Al Qaeda members were freed by the government shortly after the rebellion began; these individuals would go on to form the backbone of Daesh's leadership in Syria following the group's 2014 expansion from Iraq. Countries from all around the world are taking sides in the many conflicts raging in Syria. Russia used its veto authority at least a dozen times in the next year to defend its partner, Assad, while the United Nations Security Council attempted to enact various resolutions to address the conflict. More than 6.3 million people had been forced to flee Syria due to the war by the end of last year, making up roughly one-third of the world's total refugee population. Around the same number of people—6.2 million—have

been displaced inside Syria.<sup>7</sup>

The UN's inability to effectively handle such crises undermined its credibility as an influential force in global politics. The lack of a clear tendency toward a world war was also no source of consolation. Although, whenever the United States and the former Soviet Union came close to an all-out confrontation, as in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, they usually settled their differences bilaterally rather than through the auspices of the United Nations. On the other hand, although it was not always realistic for either superpower to give the United Nations too much control in political concerns, it was also not feasible to completely sidestep the international body.

## VI. CONCLUSION

The United Nations has surpassed the League of Nations in every respect. It's well organised and has enough members to have influence on global affairs. When contrasted with the League of Nations, it offers better alternatives and more effective problem-solving. Unlike the League, the United Nations serves as the hub of a network of organisations whose influence affects every facet of the national life of each member state. Because of this, it is now generally accepted as a necessary cog in the wheel of multi-level international relations. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has ushered in a new era in which the United Nations (UN) has a chance to finally achieve its goals. The United Nations has been called a "global government in embryo," despite the fact that its authority is always being tested by nations on the periphery of international cooperation. However, the United Nations, is criticised in particular about the structure of the Security Council and the right to veto and it was constantly expressed that there was a need for a serious reform in its structure. The five permanent members of the UN Security Council utilise the council and the UN to further their respective national interests and agendas. The veto power of the permanent members of the Security Council is clearly undemocratic and since the early 1990s, there has been talk of expanding the number of Council members, both in terms of temporary and permanent memberships with or without veto authority. Existing permanent members cannot realistically agree to willingly relinquish their veto power in order to accommodate the new permanent or temporary members, with or without veto power. In the end, the answer to the question "What is next?" is "There is no next". If we start talking about another constitution after the UN, we have to be very careful and must remember Einstein's famous words: "I do not know with what weapons World War

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<sup>7</sup> TRT World. (2018, November 28). Twelve times the UN has failed the world. Retrieved November 13, 2022, from <https://www.trtworld.com/americas/twelve-times-the-un-has-failed-the-world-21666>

III will be fought, but the fourth world war will be done with stones and sticks”.

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