

The United Nations in post-Cold War history, 1991–2011

STUDENTS WILL INVESTIGATE

In this chapter, students will examine the post-Cold War role of the United Nations as the central organisation responsible for countering threats to world peace and security.

Aspects to be covered include:

- The United Nations after the Cold War
- New threats to peace and security
- The United Nations – a new role?
- The UN in Yugoslavia 1991–92
- The UN in Cambodia 1992–93
- The UN in Somalia 1993
- The UN in Rwanda 1993–96
- The UN in Timor-Leste 1999–2001



Modern History
syllabus

Italian sculptor Arnaldo Pomodoro's *Sphere Within Sphere* at the United Nations Headquarters, New York City, USA

The role and influence of the United Nations

In the decade after the Cold War, the United Nations came to occupy a central place in the strategy for countering threats to peace and security. Many hoped it would finally be able to fulfil its Charter of promoting peace and prosperity in the world. No longer would global security be found under the umbrella of either the Soviet Union or the United States; nations were looking once again to the UN to guarantee their security and promote peace in the world. The UN 'Agenda for peace' paper of June 1992 outlined the impotence of the UN during the Cold War period.

blue helmets

The distinctive blue headgear worn by UN military personnel; the term came to refer to the UN personnel themselves

“ Since the creation of the United Nations in 1945, over 100 major conflicts around the world have left some 20 million dead. The United Nations was rendered powerless to deal with many of these crises because of the vetoes – 279 of them – cast in the Security Council, which were a vivid expression of the divisions of that period.¹ ”



SOURCE 5.1 The headquarters of the United Nations in New York houses the UN General Assembly.



SOURCE 5.2 The distinctive blue headgear of UN workers can be seen as they carry out a range of humanitarian tasks, such as feeding and housing refugees.

The world entered the 1990s on a note of optimism regarding the role of the UN. Not only were the so-called **blue helmets** deployed to keep the peace between mostly internal combatants in civil war situations, the UN also expanded its operations to include overseeing the implementation of peace agreements, disarmament, electoral observation and human rights monitoring. In other words, the UN understood that it was not enough just to keep two sides from conflict. It had to create the institutions and processes to maintain lasting peace.

The expansion of the UN's role can be seen in numbers. At the end of 1989, UN peacekeepers numbered about 11 000. This had risen to 75 000 by 1994 to meet the needs of 20 peacekeeping missions. In the three and a half years after the Cold War, the United Nations operated more missions than it had in the previous 40 years. The budget had risen 18-fold between 1989 and 1992, and then doubled again in the years afterwards.

In addition, the type of conflict shifted from conflicts between nations to national or ethnic conflicts within borders. In the early post-Cold War period, UN peacekeepers were deployed to places as diverse as Angola, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Mozambique, Cambodia and Rwanda. The blue helmets were often forced to intervene in unstable security situations, and conditions were often dangerous. In places such as Rwanda and Somalia, the conflicts were still very much alive.



As the decade wore on, the international challenges to peace and security became more nuanced than the traditional great power rivalries. This led the UN and the international community to reconsider the UN's role and redefine cherished notions of state **sovereignty** and interference. These debates about the role and influence of the UN in maintaining peace expanded to include humanitarian and peacekeeping work.

After the events of 11 September 2001 and the start of the so-called war on terror, new debates about the role and influence of the UN emerged. Central to these debates were the increasingly **unilateral** actions of the United States and Britain against Iraq, without UN approval, in March 2003. It seemed that the UN was being bypassed by some of its powerful member nations.

International challenges to peace and security in the post-Cold War world

The end of the Cold War meant that the permanent tensions of the Soviet–US rivalry dissolved and there was more willingness to cooperate in the Security Council. But the post-Cold War period also brought a series of new challenges to international peace and security. Old tensions in various parts of the world that had been masked by the Cold War re-emerged, most strikingly in Yugoslavia and Rwanda. The fall of communism in Eastern Europe had turned the world's attention to other parts of the world, including fresh tensions in the Middle East and Africa.

The First Gulf War

The new commitment to **collective security** was tested after Iraq invaded Kuwait on 2 August 1990. United Nations Resolution 678 demanded that Iraq withdraw its forces, and it set a deadline. When Iraq failed to comply by 15 January 1991, a US-led contingent of a large number of nations helped to restore sovereignty to Kuwait in a short war that lasted from mid-January until March 1991. The operation had the effect of lifting the global prestige of the United Nations.

But the example of the First Gulf War was not without its problems. Critics suggested that, although the United Nations shared in the success, it was largely American-led and without UN symbols or flags. The historian Omayma Abdel-Latif also argues that America overreached the UN mandate by bombing retreating Iraqi forces and assisting Kurdish forces in the north in their attempt to remove Saddam Hussein.

The First Gulf War was significant because the United States, as the sole **superpower**, demonstrated its willingness to use the institutions and organs of the United Nations to solve international conflicts. But the conflict in Iraq was a straightforward violation of the sovereignty of one nation by another. As we shall see, the character of conflict in the 1990s changed.

Ethnic conflicts

Increasingly, instead of resolving conflict between two sovereign states, the United Nations had to mediate and offer humanitarian aid to ethnic or religious groups that were under threat from governments or militias in their own country. These conflicts were part of a resurgent nationalism that had been repressed by the overarching rivalry between East and West during the Cold War. Nonetheless, they led to new calls for independence, which often led to civil war.

The conflict within national borders in places such as Yugoslavia, Cambodia, East Timor, Somalia and Rwanda revolved around ethnicity, race and religion. It was not always easy to determine who supported, and who challenged, the UN.

Intervention and state sovereignty

The intervention of the United Nations in domestic conflicts led to new questions about the UN's role and state sovereignty. If the UN was to intervene in intrastate conflict, civil war and differences

sovereignty

The idea that all states should be free from outside interference to determine their own political future

unilateral

Conducting foreign affairs with minimal consultation with other nations



The United Nations: Fifty Years of Keeping the Peace

collective security

The principle that an aggressor state should be opposed by the entire international community

superpower

A great power that dominates the international system, has global reach that is underpinned by a strong economy and possesses superior military capacity





between ethnic groups, then this would go against the longstanding principle, in international relations, of non-intervention in internal disputes. The nature of these internal post-Cold War conflicts meant that questions of state sovereignty needed to be revisited.

This was a difficult discussion to have since the concept of state sovereignty had been the bedrock of international relations. But the UN decided that the concept might be outdated.

“ The foundation-stone of this work is and must remain the State. Respect for its fundamental sovereignty and integrity are crucial to any common international progress. The time of absolute and exclusive sovereignty, however, has passed; its theory was never matched by reality. It is the task of leaders of States today to understand this and to find a balance between the needs of good internal governance and the requirements of an ever more interdependent world. ”

‘An agenda for peace’, www.un-documents.net/a47-277.htm, June 1992

Responsibility to protect

In September 2005, the United Nations adopted the principle of the ‘responsibility to protect’. The UN’s failure to protect civilian populations in Somalia, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia led to reforms within the UN. Arguments that state sovereignty was inviolable were pushed aside when it came to gross and systematic abuses of human rights. The principle of responsibility to protect extended the idea of state sovereignty by declaring that those countries that wanted to enjoy their sovereignty needed to accept responsibility for the safety and welfare of their populations. If those states failed in this responsibility, the international community would intervene to protect.

At the UN World Summit in 2005, member states officially adopted the principle. Paragraphs 138 and 139 of the summit’s outcome document outlined the responsibilities of states and detailed the types of interventions that could be carried out should the state fail in its duty.

The United Nations and the ‘war on terror’

The decision of the United States to adopt a unilateral and militaristic response to the events of 11 September 2001 undermined the progress the United Nations had made in the 1990s as an organising force for maintaining peace and security. The US response led international relations experts John O’Neill and Nicholas Rees to conclude:

“ The US response in Afghanistan and Iraq has been predictable and consistent with the increasingly unilateralist and militaristic policy pursued by the Bush Administration ... Such an approach does not bode well for the UN and suggests that the consensus that existed in the Security Council in the early 1990s is over. ”

JT O’Neill and N Rees, *United Nations Peacekeeping in the Post-Cold War Era*, Routledge, London, 2005, p. 3

By November 2002, it was clear that the US was going to adopt a path that was at odds with the UN. When UN weapons inspectors were sent into Iraq to find evidence of a weapons development program, it was clear that the Americans were not going to accept their findings. The chief inspector, Hans Blix, repeatedly claimed that the weapons program was non-existent and appealed to the Americans to provide evidence that would verify their claims. The UN team withdrew in January 2003, having found nothing, while the Americans insisted on the truth of their claims.

- 1 How did the prominence of the UN change after the Cold War?
- 2 Outline the expanded role of the UN in international affairs.
- 3 How did the nature of conflict change in the post-Cold War world?
- 4 To what extent was the notion of sovereignty still relevant after 1990?
- 5 Explain how the war on terror changed the relationship between the UN and the United States.





Debate over the role and influence of the United Nations

The Cold War prevented the United Nations from fully carrying out its Charter up until 1990. Under the shadow of superpower conflict and a largely bipolar world, the UN's structures prevented it from dealing with some of the crises for which it was designed. For example, the UN Security Council – a body set up to deal with questions of war and conflict – was hampered by the permanent membership of the United States and the Soviet Union. Each had a veto, which they used to block UN involvement in conflicts in which they themselves had an interest. It has been argued that the US used the UN to contain communism during this period and that, in a range of cases, from the Iranian hostage crisis to Northern Ireland and the Iran–Iraq War, participants simply ignored UN Security Council directives.

The UN is active in many fields, including education, sustainable development, environmental protection and many others. Below are three areas where it has been influential during conflict in the post-Cold War era:

- peacekeeping
- humanitarian aid
- upholding international law.

United Nations peacekeeping

Given the nature of the disputes in which the United Nations intervened during the 1990s, the role of UN peacekeeping has come under intense scrutiny. UN peacekeeping missions were typically deployed to restore peace or maintain agreements, but had no authority to use force. They were carried out by military personnel with orders to remain neutral and impartial. This meant that, in the event of an attack by one group on another, they were often powerless to intervene and, except in cases of self-defence, they could not act. In addition, UN peacekeeping missions were established only if both sides in a conflict agreed to welcome a UN presence. The legal limits to UN peacekeeping operations often revolved around issues of state sovereignty.

The UN would need a strong framework to organise its activities. In June 1992, a paper titled 'An agenda for peace' addressed the new challenges for security and proposed expanded UN powers. The document also committed to the principle of state sovereignty, but with limits. It contained four pillars for the future of UN peacekeeping operations, as set out in the following table.



TABLE 5.1 The four pillars for the future of United Nations peacekeeping

PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY	PEACEMAKING	PEACE BUILDING	PEACEKEEPING
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resolve disputes before violence breaks out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce intensity of conflict through diplomatic negotiation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Build political and legal institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement ceasefires and peace agreements • Demobilise and disarm militias • Protect humanitarian personnel

Humanitarian aid

The nature of disputes in the post-Cold War era also meant that the United Nations would have to engage in humanitarian work. This became obvious at the end of the First Gulf War, when the UN intervened to deliver aid to Kurdish civilians in the north who, encouraged by the United States to attempt to overthrow Saddam's Ba'athist regime, were the victims of chemical attack. The UN created safe havens and commenced Operation Provide Comfort.



Getty Images/Roberto Schmidt/AP

SOURCE 5.3 A United Nations peacekeeper in Haiti helps a local woman after the earthquake that hit Haiti on 12 January 2010, which left 170 000 dead and 1 million homeless.

It is not only in conflict that the United Nations has been called in to coordinate humanitarian efforts. Often, the UN comes in after natural disasters to bring urgently needed food aid, shelter and medical help. They are also called in to assist with a refugee crisis when a neighbouring country is overrun by refugees from a conflict across the border.

But by far the largest need for humanitarian aid is in conflict. Often, fighting over land disrupts farming and livestock production and leads to famine. Displaced peoples fleeing conflict zones are also a huge problem. A number of agencies, including the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP), coordinate humanitarian efforts.

In the aftermath of natural disasters, the UN has demonstrated a commitment to mobilise

resources. For example, in January 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck Haiti, killing 200 000 people and leaving two million homeless. The UN was among the first responders, setting up field hospitals, leading search and rescue missions and restoring vital infrastructure. It also provided an additional 2000 military personnel and 1500 police to assist with the humanitarian aid.

The United Nations and international law

The 1946 Nuremberg trials of 21 Nazi leaders showed that it was possible to bring war criminals to justice. No longer could autocrats or dictators operate with **impunity**. More importantly, the Nuremberg trials demonstrated that those who carried out orders to commit atrocities would not be exempt from punishment, either.

The main organ in the United Nations for settling disputes between nations is the International Court of Justice. Its 15 judges settle disputes, based on international law. The UN also created special tribunals to prosecute perpetrators of the genocides in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In the case of Yugoslavia, the UN established the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in May 1993 so that it could immediately collect evidence as the conflict was taking place. The first indictment was in November 1994, against a detention camp commander, for atrocities committed against non-Serb civilians in Bosnia. In November 1995, two high-profile Bosnian Serb leaders, Radovan Karadžić and Ratko Mladić, were indicted on charges of genocide. The first trial commenced in May 1996. In May 1999, the UN set another standard in international justice when it indicted a sitting head of state, Yugoslavian leader Slobodan Milošević, for his actions against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo in the same year.

The home of the UN’s organs of justice is at The Hague in the Netherlands, where high-profile war criminals such as Milošević and Karadžić were prosecuted, and where, in 2017, Ratko Mladić was sentenced to life imprisonment after being convicted of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity. Other notable war criminals to have faced justice through the UN include Charles Taylor from Sierra Leone and a range of leaders of the Rwandan genocide, the most infamous being Jean-Paul Akayesu.

impunity

Freedom from punishment; the state of being above the law



The United Nations in the former Yugoslavia, 1991–92

The civil war in the former Yugoslavia after the end of the Cold War reinforced to the world just how challenging it was to maintain peace in the post-Cold War world, and represented a new role for the United Nations as an international peacekeeper. Nationalist sentiments that seemed to be a relic of another era fuelled a conflict in the Yugoslav federation that shocked the world and introduced the term **ethnic cleansing** into the geopolitical lexicon. Under the long-running presidency of Josip Tito, who died in 1980, ethnic tensions between Serbians, Croats, Bosnian Muslims, Slovenes and Albanians were largely suppressed in the name of cooperation towards a socialist ideal. Tito's death and the end of the Cold War brought longstanding rivalries to the surface.

ethnic cleansing

The killing of members of one ethnic or religious group or their expulsion from a geographical area



Background to the conflict

The Yugoslav federation was made up of six republics – Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia. Greater calls for independence within the federation following the fall of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe led to tensions within the Serb-dominated federal government and military. Ordinary Yugoslavians were calling for change. Accompanying that desire for change, however, was not a movement towards Western-style liberal democracy, like that being adopted in the rest of the former communist bloc, but an ethnically based **nationalism**. This predated the formation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after World War I and its reconstitution by Tito as a socialist republic after World War II. Nationalism was not the only fuel. An economic and political crisis had gripped Yugoslavia in the final years of the 1980s.

nationalism

The construction of national identity to mobilise support for a political purpose

The anxiety of the other republics was in part a fear that a so-called Greater Serbia would attempt to dominate the rest of Yugoslavia. The basis of this was a renewal of a Serb nationalism that stretched back centuries and looked to more recent history for its justification. Serb nationalists claimed that Tito, who was a Croat, had tried to deliberately weaken the Serb area. In a famous memorandum calling for a Greater Serbia, it was claimed that a 14th-century battle against ethnic Albanians in Kosovo justified Serb ownership of the region. In short, the Serbian-dominated Yugoslav nationalists painted themselves as underdogs against a more powerful Croatia, and their attempt to reassert their power resulted in a virulent strain of nationalism that would give rise to ethnic cleansing.



SOURCE 5.4 The former Yugoslavia was made up of six republics (Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, and Macedonia) in a federation that was ruled from Belgrade, in Serbian territory.

The course of the conflict

When Slovenia and Croatia declared independence in 1991, the Serb-dominated federal parliament in Belgrade rejected the move. Slovenia declared its independence on 25 June 1991 after a plebiscite resulted in an overwhelming vote to secede from the rest of Yugoslavia. Slovenes feared that Serbia would dominate the federation after the end of the Cold War. After a short, 10-day war against the Yugoslav Army, Slovenia gained its independence.

The situation in Croatia was further complicated by the presence of a large group of Croatian Serbs. Under the pretence of trying to protect local Serbs, Serbian President Slobodan Milošević sent the Yugoslav Army into Croatia, where it occupied one-third of the republic. In September 1991, open conflict broke out between the Yugoslav Army and Croat forces. In February 1992, the UN sent in a peacekeeping mission, and the international community recognised Croatia's independence in the same year.

The struggle between Croats and Serbs turned into a full-blown civil war over disputed areas of Bosnia and Herzegovina. With Bosnian Muslims making up nearly 45 per cent of the population, Serbs making up over 30 per cent, and a minority of Croats, dividing up the republic would lead to significant conflict. During 1991, in response to free elections in Bosnia, Milošević declared a 'Serb Autonomous Region'. On 5 April 1992, encouraged by the Croatian independence movement, Bosnia and Herzegovina declared its own independence. The Serb minority, armed by Milošević, rejected this outcome. Bosnian Serb nationalists also rejected the so-called three-state solution, which would have divided Bosnia into Croat, Muslim and Serb areas, and commenced a program of driving out ethnic Muslims from their area – the process of ethnic cleansing. In April, the Serbs blockaded the city of Sarajevo in a siege that lasted four years.

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Alamy Stock Photo/Justin Leighton

SOURCE 5.5 A UN tank shields civilians from snipers as they cross the road in Sarajevo, 1995.





Under the leadership of the Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadžić, Serb forces took some two-thirds of Bosnia in quick time. Their methods were brutal, and included torture, mass rape, displacement and deportation of civilians, and destruction of property. They rounded up ethnic Muslims and Croats, put them in detention centres and murdered them in large numbers. Mass graves were discovered afterwards. It is estimated that about 80 000 Bosnians were murdered in the war between 1992 and 1995.

The UN declared the program of ethnic cleansing a genocide. The most infamous massacre took place at Srebrenica, where Bosnian Serb forces under the command of the Serbian war criminal General Ratko Mladić rounded up and murdered more than 8000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys.

The role and impact of United Nations forces

On 25 September 1991, alarmed by the outbreak of fighting among Serb, Croat and Slovene forces, the United Nations Security Council placed an embargo on the shipment of arms to Yugoslavia. Critics have suggested that this ban favoured Serbia because, as the most powerful republic and seat of the capital, it had control over the military and existing arms. In other words, Milošević was using the Yugoslav Army to further the interests of Serbia.

UN forces first entered Yugoslavia in February 1992, only months after Serbia invaded Croatia. The United Nations Protection Force entered the country to create safe havens for local Croats against Serb forces, and committed to stay for an initial period of 12 months.

Making peace: the Vance–Owen plan

By January 1993, it became clear that Bosnia was in crisis. United Nations Special Envoy Cyrus Vance and a European Community representative, Lord Owen, put forward the UN-backed Vance–Owen peace plan. The plan proposed dividing Bosnia and Herzegovina into 10 separate semi-autonomous regions based on ethnic groups. The Bosnian Serb President Radovan Karadžić was behind the plan and signed it on 30 April, but a referendum held in mid-May overwhelmingly rejected the plan when 96 per cent of people voted against it.

The UN's involvement in the civil war cut to the heart of questions of sovereignty and intervention. One of the core principles of UN intervention in a conflict is the agreement of each of the disputing parties. However, in February 1992, the UN had determined that the threat of a new conflagration was more serious than groups expressing objections to the UN plan.

The UN mission was to create safe havens in Croatia to protect civilians from the killing. These United Nations Protected Areas (UNPAs) needed to be demilitarised. A further goal was to remove all of the Serb-dominated Yugoslav Army from Croatia. Throughout 1992, a series of expansions of the mission allowed the UN to control who came into and out of the UNPAs and allowed peacekeepers to move outside the zones. The role and actions of the UN included securing Sarajevo's airport to allow much-needed food and medical aid to reach those displaced by the war. The UN enforced a no-fly zone of military aircraft in Bosnian airspace and sought to prevent weapons from getting into Bosnia by sending observers to border control stations. In light of the fact that the Serb leadership did not cooperate with the UN peacekeepers, the president of Macedonia invited a contingent of UN peacekeepers into his country out of fear that the war would spill over there.

The failure to stop the murder of people, even in safe areas, was a fundamental shortcoming of the mission. The following source study examines the reasons for the UN's failure to protect Bosnian Croats and Muslims.

United Nations' failure in the former Yugoslavia

SOURCE A

David Rieff was a journalist working in Bosnia at the time of the civil war. These are his recollections.

I had put everything else on hold, resolved to write as frankly incendiary a narrative as I could of my journeys to the slaughterhouse that the Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina became in the spring of 1992. If the bad news about Bosnia could just be brought home to people, I remember thinking, the slaughter would not be allowed to continue ... I say slaughter because to refer to what has happened there as a war is to distort, and more gravely, to dignify the real nature of what has occurred ... The Serbs came, they slaughtered, they conquered, while the world looked on.

David Rieff, *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West*, Simon and Schuster, New York, 1995, pp. 9, 17

SOURCE B

Critics charged that the UN had utterly failed in the former Yugoslavia. Key officials of the UN, particularly Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali ... were criticised for their reluctance to authorize the use of force (particularly airstrikes) against the Bosnian Serbs and for their concern for the security of UN peacekeepers (as opposed to victims of the Bosnian conflict). Although there may have been some validity to these criticisms, many people pointed out that the responsibility for the UN's failures in the former Yugoslavia lies at least as much – and probably much more – with the member states of the organization (especially the major powers). The permanent members of the UN Security Council repeatedly voted for Security Council resolutions that they did not have the will to enforce. Thus, they authorized the UN-designated safe areas but then failed to provide the military forces that the UN secretary-general argued were necessary to defend those areas. Supporters of the UN's role in the former Yugoslavia argued that, for all its failures, the UN had at least helped to ameliorate or limit the human suffering caused by the conflict.

Andrew S Cotty, 'Bosnian genocide' in P Bartrop and S Leonard Jacobs (eds), *Modern Genocide: The Definitive Resource and Document Collection*, ABC-CLIO, California, 2015, p. 384

QUESTIONS

- 1 What is the attitude and tone of the writer in Source A?
- 2 How useful is Source A for a historian studying the war in Yugoslavia? In your answer, comment on perspective and reliability.
- 3 According to Source B, what are the criticisms of the UN mission to Bosnia, and what were its successes?

- 1 Explain why nationalism was such an important factor in the drift towards war in the former Yugoslavia.
- 2 What was the concept of Greater Serbia and why did it cause so much anxiety in the republics?
- 3 Why did the Bosnian claim to independence spark the war, rather than those of Slovenia or Croatia in June 1991?
- 4 What atrocities accompanied the practice of ethnic cleansing?
- 5 What were some of the UN's actions and goals in Bosnia?
- 6 Why did the UN mission fail?



The United Nations in Cambodia, 1992–93

Since the Khmer Rouge under Pol Pot took power in Cambodia in April 1975, the tiny South-East Asian country had been deeply scarred by the experience of a brutal, and arguably genocidal, dictatorship and war. The Khmer Rouge was a brutal communist regime that took the lives of an estimated 1.7 million people by attempting to create a classless society, made up only of peasants, and winding the clock back to ‘Year Zero’. Pol Pot was driven from power in January 1979 when the Vietnamese seized Cambodia’s capital, Phnom Penh, and an ensuing war between the two countries lasted until the Vietnamese withdrew from the country in September 1989.

Three main factions struggled for power after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese: the conservative monarchy, a people’s national liberation front and the Khmer Rouge. By 1989, the threat of civil war loomed large over Cambodia, and the United Nations took two years of negotiations to broker a peace agreement among the factions. In the meantime, each faction had built up a large supply of weapons to arm its militias, and 350 000 people were driven from their homes.

In October 1991, the warring factions came together to sign the Paris Agreement, which established the 12-member Supreme National Council. This council was headed by Prince Norodom Sihanouk, a conservative monarchist and former head of state, but also included Khmer Rouge representatives and representatives from the Khmer People’s National Liberation Front. It was an uneasy peace, held together by the United Nations, which had already had a security presence in the country. New elections were set for 23–27 May 1993.

The historian Trevor Findlay points out that one of the more unsettling and morally ambiguous issues surrounding the Paris Agreement was what to do about the genocide committed by Pol Pot in the 1970s. While some argued for war crimes trials, the overwhelming sentiment was to push the issue to the side in the interests of attempting to achieve Cambodian unity.

The Americans denounced the inclusion of the Khmer Rouge in the council. US Secretary of State James A Baker wanted to ensure that American humanitarian aid did not make it into the hands of the Khmer Rouge, and he was determined to keep them from gaining power – even though they were the strongest of the three factions. By July 1992, the Khmer Rouge had withdrawn from the peace process. During October, the governments of Japan and Thailand attempted to bring the Khmer Rouge back into the electoral process, but failed.

The UN was given the mandate of overseeing the disarmament of the warring factions, but the Khmer Rouge refused to disarm. Throughout 1993, after they announced that the UN was not welcome in Khmer-controlled zones without permission, the Khmer Rouge targeted UN peacekeepers in minor skirmishes.

The Khmer’s refusal to disarm meant that the UN delayed disarmament of the other factions after January 1993. The Khmer was active in trying to limit the smooth running of free elections. Between March and the scheduled election date of 23 May 1993, the Khmer was responsible for nearly 200 politically motivated deaths. In April, they had murdered three Bulgarian peacekeepers and some UN civil contractors. Nonetheless, the elections went ahead and the UN mission in Cambodia was widely regarded as a success.



Getty Images/Bettmann

SOURCE 5.6 Pol Pot’s reign of terror lasted from 1975 until 1979 and resulted in the deaths of 1.7 million Cambodians.





The role and impact of the United Nations in Cambodia

The United Nations established the United Nations Advance Mission in Cambodia (UNAMIC) in October 1991, at the same time as the Paris Agreement was signed. The mission's main function was to create neutral areas where warring factions could disarm and demobilise their soldiers.

In March 1992, UNAMIC had transformed into the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC), which was established to oversee the elections and enforce the ceasefire. The UN peacekeeping force was large, with some 22 000 personnel from 32 countries – including 600 Australian military personnel and an Australian commander of the international military force, Lieutenant General John Sanderson.



Getty Images/Langevin Jacques

SOURCE 5.7 UN soldiers help Cambodian refugees returning to Cambodia from camps in Thailand remove their belongings from a train in Phnom Penh. The Khmer Rouge genocide and the Vietnamese occupation from 1979 to 1989 forced many people to find refuge in neighbouring countries.

The mission had two main priorities. First, to disarm the different factions, which it did with limited success. The Khmer's refusal to disarm meant that it enforced disarmament with other groups in a half-hearted fashion by the beginning of 1993.

The second priority was to oversee elections and create an environment in which people could register and vote, free of political and government intimidation. That the election went ahead in May 1993 with a 90 per cent participation rate is widely regarded as a success. The UN had provided 50 000 staff to conduct the election and was successful in implementing education programs about the electoral process.

In the weeks after the election, in which Cambodians democratically elected a coalition government made up of the major parties, a constitutional monarchy led by King Norodom Sihanouk was restored. UNTAC was dissolved in September 1993.

The historian Trevor Findlay lists nine roles of the UN in Cambodia:

- supervision of the withdrawal of foreign military forces from Cambodia
- disarmament and demobilisation of the internal factions
- location and confiscation of caches of weapons



- the conduct of a free and fair election (rather than just observing)
- promotion and protection of human rights
- oversight of military and civil administration until a new government was in place
- resettlement of Cambodian refugees
- assisting with mine clearance
- rebuilding essential infrastructure.

Trevor Findlay on Cambodia

SOURCE A

UNTAC was to be the most ambitious operation in the history of UN peacekeeping. 'Peacekeeping' indeed seemed a highly inadequate term to describe the totality of the UN role envisaged: the UNTAC operation is better described as a mixture of peacekeeping, peace making and peace building. In its complexity and comprehensiveness it remains the epitome of what have become known as 'second-generation' multinational operations.

SOURCE B

The Cambodia operation, the UN's biggest ... operation to date, was also its most utopian. Its intention was to help long-standing warring opponents achieve a cease-fire, canton and disarm their forces, and involve themselves in a democratic process never before experienced in the country, with the aim of establishing a united, stable, pluralistic state based on constitutional law ... Never before had the UN organized an election, attempted to supervise and control a functioning government administration or conducted a fully fledged human rights campaign in a member state ... In this context, the international community had set UNTAC an impossible task ... In retrospect, even Gareth Evans [Australia's foreign minister], one of the architects of the Cambodia settlement, acknowledges that UNTAC's mandate was 'overly ambitious and in some respects clearly not achievable'.

(Sources A and B) Trevor Findlay, *Cambodia: The Legacy and Lessons of UNTAC*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 14

QUESTIONS

- 1 In Source A, how does Findlay describe the UN's scope beyond peacekeeping?
- 2 According to Source B, in what sense was the Cambodia operation 'utopian'?
- 3 In Source B, does Findlay regard the mission as a success? Explain.

- 1 Describe the background to the Paris Agreement in 1991.
- 2 Identify the three main factions vying for power in Cambodia after the withdrawal of the Vietnamese in 1989.
- 3 What was the role of the Supreme National Council?
- 4 What were some problems with, and attitudes towards, the Khmer Rouge's participation in the elections to be held in May 1993?
- 5 Why did the Khmer Rouge withdraw from the peace process?
- 6 What was the main role of the UN force in Cambodia, and how successful was it?



The United Nations in Somalia, 1993

failed state

A state without a functioning government, economy or security force

Somalia is often characterised as a **failed state**, as indicated by the absence of a functioning government and public institutions. The collapse of the regime of President Mohammad Siad Barre in January 1991 left a power vacuum in which a broad range of clan-based factions fought to replace the regime. The fighting gave rise to a humanitarian crisis, and starvation, violence and displacement forced the United Nations and the United States to intervene in the country. By 1995, both the US and the UN had withdrawn after rebel groups began targeting and killing their military personnel. What started out as a violent civil war soon became a threat to international peacekeepers and observers. At first, the mission of the US and the UN was to protect the delivery of humanitarian aid, but when it expanded into so-called nation-building, the intensity of the conflict increased. Their mission was a failure.

Background to the conflict

Somalia is Africa's most easterly country. It is geographically positioned along 3000 kilometres of coastline around the Horn of Africa. Its position made it a valuable trading port and the gateway between Africa and Asia. It links the Indian Ocean, the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea. In early 1991, President Siad Barre was deposed after a generation of brutal autocratic rule that had begun in 1969. Given the geopolitical position of Somalia, Siad Barre enjoyed the support of both the United States and the Soviet Union throughout his rule. But the end of the Cold War meant that support would be withdrawn.

As was the case with many African nations, Somalia's borders were drawn up as spoils of European imperialism in the second half of the 19th century, in the so-called Scramble for Africa. In 1977, Siad Barre decided to make a historical claim on the Ethiopian territory of Ogaden, a Somali-speaking region to the east of Ethiopia. Siad Barre sent his troops into the country under the guise of a so-called – but probably non-existent – Western Somali Liberation Front, and attempted to **annex** the region. Siad Barre and his forces were defeated after the Soviets intervened in the conflict on the side of Ethiopia.

annex

To claim the territory of another sovereign state as your own

That war was significant for another reason. Over the next decade, the Ethiopian government began to undermine Siad Barre's Somali regime by arming various rebel groups. Any loyalty to the Somali nation was collapsing and **sectarianism** was rife as clans, and ethnic and religious factions, pressed for independence and power. By 1991, groups from the north and south of the country – headed by the United Congress of Somalia and funded by Ethiopia – successfully overran the regime. After 27 years of brutal autocratic rule, Siad Barre was deposed, leading to the collapse of the Somali state and a humanitarian catastrophe. What followed was 25 years without a central government.

sectarianism

Excessive devotion to a particular religious or ethnic group

The course of the conflict

The end of the Siad Barre regime reignited a civil war that had been running since January 1991. During 1991–92, there was intense conflict between factions loyal to interim president Ali Mahdi Mohamed – the successor to Siad Barre – and those loyal to the chairman of the United Somali Congress, General Mohamed Farrah Aidid. The sides clashed over land and resources in southern Somalia.

The clashes between Aidid and Ali Mahdi plunged Somalia into a humanitarian crisis. In the countryside, farming and livestock production was disrupted, resulting in a famine that by December 1992 had cost the lives of 250 000 Somalis and threatened a further 4.5 million people in the countryside. There was widespread destruction and looting in major cities – particularly in the capital, Mogadishu, which was the main site of violent clashes.





The violence and famine led to a refugee crisis as millions of people both within Somalia and in neighbouring Ethiopia and Kenya fled their homes. Somaliland, the former British-controlled area in the north-west of Somalia, had declared its independence in 1991, and it provided limited protection for some of those fleeing the country.

Violence, famine and the movement of refugees led to an urgent humanitarian crisis. The United Nations arrived in July 1992, and aid agencies began delivering hundreds of thousands of tonnes of food aid to a starving population, but shipments were not getting through to where they were needed. A deteriorating security situation, looting and harassment of aid workers crippled the aid efforts. Control over the distribution of food became a major political issue. Factional warlords believed that they could win the loyalty of the regions by handing out food. Opponents could withhold food and starve local regions into submission. Famine had effectively become an instrument of war.

US intervention, 1992–94

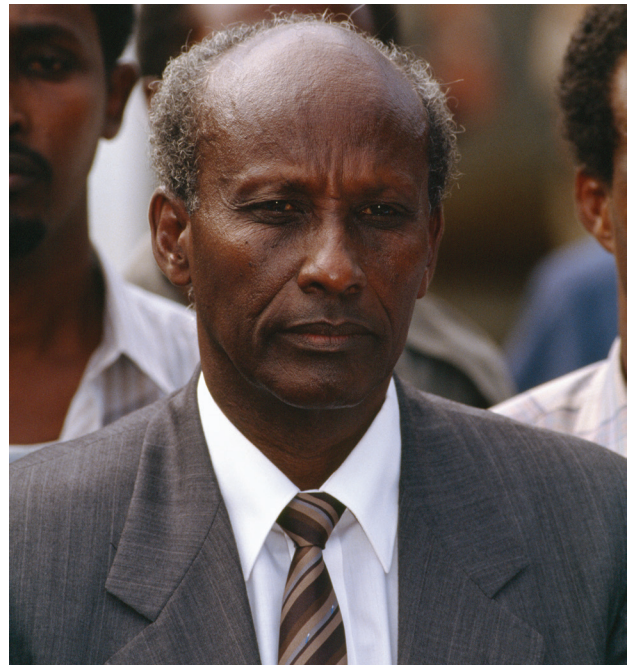
On 4 December 1992, US President George HW Bush addressed the American people to outline the situation in Somalia. He announced that the United States would commit 28 000 American troops to Somalia to help secure the food supply and make the area safe for a United Nations peacekeeping mission. As a result, Operation Restore Hope was launched. Below is an extract from President Bush's address of 4 December 1992, in which he outlines the scope of the mission.

“ Once we have created that secure environment, we will withdraw our troops, handing the security mission back to a regular UN peacekeeping force. Our mission has a limited objective: To open the supply routes, to get the food moving, and to prepare the way for a UN peacekeeping force to keep it moving ... Let me be very clear: Our mission is humanitarian, but we will not tolerate armed gangs ripping off their own people, condemning them to death by starvation ... To the people of Somalia I promise this: We do not plan to dictate political outcomes. We respect your sovereignty and independence. ”

President George HW Bush, 4 December 1992, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=21758>

By March 1993, the threat of starvation had been averted but the security situation remained fragile. Accordingly, the US should have handed over to the UN peacekeeping forces. However, at the request of the UN Secretary-General, new US President Bill Clinton decided to extend the US mission to help build government structures. A further expansion of the original mission may have caused more conflict when the US adopted the goal of removing Mohamed Farrah Aidid from power. Over the next six months, US forces became targets of Aidid forces. Fighting in Mogadishu became increasingly intense, and between June and October, 19 US soldiers were killed.

In October 1993, two US Black Hawk helicopters were shot down over Mogadishu, killing 18 US Army personnel. Images of dead American soldiers, tied up and being dragged through the streets, were splashed over the front pages of international newspapers and aired on television. President Clinton denounced the act on US television and announced a commitment to withdraw the remaining American troops by the end of March 1994. Despite the US's intention to complete its humanitarian work, it had failed in its mission. Warlords were simply able to resume control over much of the country.



Getty Images/Patrick Robert - Corbis

SOURCE 5.8 General Mohamed Farrah Aidid was the head of the United Somali Congress, which overthrew the regime of President Siad Barre in January 1991. By March 1993, the United States aimed to remove Aidid from power, resulting in a more intense conflict.





Getty Images/Scott Peterson

SOURCE 5.9 United States intervention in Somalia began as a mission to bring relief to starving Somalis caught up in factional fighting. When its mission extended to removing Aidid from power, first the Somalis, and then American opinion, turned against the mission. The US withdrew in March 1994. Here, children stand on the wreckage of an American Black Hawk helicopter, shot down by Somali warlords in October 1993.

CNN effect

The impact of television by provoking the sympathies of viewers and influencing foreign policy

The so-called **CNN effect** – whereby television images evoke sympathy and influence foreign policy – was undoubtedly a factor in getting the Americans into Somalia. Images of starving Somalis, the victims of rebel warlords who were blocking UN food supplies, provoked American sympathies. Equally, images of dead American soldiers being paraded through the streets of Mogadishu had the effect of turning American public opinion against US military involvement. The incident left the American public with a strong distaste for getting involved in further conflict. This was to have catastrophic consequences in Rwanda a year later.

After the US withdrawal, fighting between the factions continued. By 1994, there were up to 19 clans attending UN-sponsored attempts at mediation, but they resented the presence of the international community and targeted the blue helmets. The main warlord, Aidid, would not work with the UN to achieve peace. By March 1995, the situation was so dangerous in Somalia that the United Nations could no longer continue its work.

In July 1996, Aidid suffered a gunshot wound during a battle with another factional clan. On 2 August, just before going into surgery, he died of a heart attack. After Aidid's death, the number of factions at war continued to grow. No stable government would emerge and by the late 1990s, regions such as Puntland and Jubaland declared their autonomy from the rest of Somalia.

The UN mission in Somalia was a failure.

The role and impact of the United Nations in Somalia

The first United Nations Operation in Somalia (UNOSOM I) was established by UN Security Council Resolutions 733 and 746 in April 1992 to provide humanitarian aid and monitor a UN-brokered ceasefire. In December 1992, UN Security Council Resolution 794 extended its goal to allow a United States-led military force of peacekeepers to ensure that aid was being distributed. Between 1993 and 1995, UNOSOM II was implemented, with a much broader goal of 'nation building', in an attempt to build a new government. These missions were widely regarded as a failure – and, moreover, an overreach of the United Nations Charter.





The UN intervention in Somalia was different from conflicts in places such as Yugoslavia. For example, there was no central government after the removal of Siad Barre, there were no official law and order or security services and, most importantly, the UN was not invited into the conflict zone.

Othman O Mahmood offers the following explanation for the failure of the UN mission in Somalia.

“ The preliminary reason for the UN operation’s failure in Somalia was that the UN intervention in the Somali crisis came one year after the collapse of Somalia’s governmental institutions and was too little, too late ... Due to its faulty start, UNOSOM I had to be scrapped altogether because the situation in Somalia demanded strong multinational forces (UNITAF) to be assembled under the leadership of the U.S. Central Command ... The firepower of UNITAF intimidated the warring factions in Somalia. In less than four months, law and order were restored in most major urban areas in Somalia. Due to this positive development, the US administration demanded that the responsibility for the operation be taken over by UNOSOM II. Because UNITAF did not eliminate the belligerent parties (the aggressors) in the Somali civil war, UNOSOM II could not complete its mission as planned. A major factor making it ineffective was the change from a military to a diplomatic operation. History teaches us that as long as the belligerent party in the conflict is active, diplomacy will not work.² ”

- 1 Describe the reasons that Somalia is considered a failed state.
- 2 Outline the main points in the background to the civil war in Somalia.
- 3 What impact did the removal from power of Siad Barre have on Somalia?
- 4 What role did sectarianism play in the conflict?
- 5 Provide a detailed explanation of the role the distribution of food played in the conflict.
- 6 Read the quote from George HW Bush on page 129 and outline his main goals for the mission to Somalia.
- 7 How did the mission change after March 1993, and what impact did this have on the intensity of the conflict?
- 8 Explain the CNN effect as it appears in Somalia.
- 9 Why was the UN mission to Somalia different from other peacekeeping missions?
- 10 How does Othman O Mahmood account for the failure of the UN mission?

The United Nations in Rwanda

The conflict in Rwanda between April and July 1994 resulted in the deaths of 800 000 people. It is regarded as a **genocide** perpetrated against the Tutsi people by the dominant Hutu government, and in November 1994 the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda commenced proceedings against the main culprits on charges including genocide. The United Nations has been criticised for not doing enough to prevent the slaughter.

genocide

The systematic killing of people belonging to a particular ethnic or racial group

Long-term causes

As with any conflict, there was a mix of long-term and short-term causes for the conflict in Rwanda. Rwanda was declared a **mandate** of Belgium after World War I, and that country favoured the minority Tutsi people over the majority Hutus, who made up 85 per cent of the population. In truth, there were very few cultural differences between the two groups. Both shared the same language and many traditions. But the longstanding colonial strategy of putting in place subjects loyal to the coloniser suited the Belgians, who supported minority Tutsi rule. As a result, ethnic tensions between the two groups developed over time.

mandate

A territory assigned to another, usually larger, power





A 1959 uprising by the Hutus resulted in the death of 20 000 Tutsis and forced a further 300 000 to flee the region. Many of these exiles moved north into Uganda, where they settled for two generations. Two years later, the ruling Tutsi monarch was overthrown, the Hutus declared Rwanda a republic and in July 1962 the country was granted its independence.

In 1973, General Juvénal Habyarimana, a Hutu, was installed by military coup, and then held office for the next two decades. Habyarimana had long been a member of the Hutu government, first as a chief of staff and then as a police and defence minister.

Getty Images/William STEVENS



Short-term causes

In 1990, Tutsi rebels, led by the future Rwandan President Paul Kagame (since 2000), began to engage in border raids from their northern base in Uganda. The Tutsi-led Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) invaded Rwanda in October 1990, and over the next two years, negotiations between the RPF and Habyarimana's government resulted in a power-sharing agreement between the Hutu majority and Tutsi minority, to be implemented in August 1993.

The border clashes and violence led extremist elements in the Hutu political community to turn what was a political issue into one of race. They accused the Tutsi community of being subversive traitors and commenced a campaign of propaganda and hatred against the Tutsis.

The direct cause of the violence was an incident on 6 April 1994. A plane carrying Rwandan President Habyarimana and Burundi President Cyprien Ntaryamira, both Hutus, was shot down over the Rwandan capital of Kigali. The call immediately went out from Hutu extremists to murder all Tutsis in the capital – even though it was not clear who was responsible for shooting down the plane. Hutu extremists blamed the Tutsi, while the Tutsi blamed extremist Hutus, who they said had shot down the plane as an excuse to commence the genocide. A French judge put the blame on the Tutsi leader, and later president, Paul Kagame.

SOURCE 5.10 Rwandan Hutu President Juvénal Habyarimana ruled Rwanda for two decades between 1973 and his death in April 1994. The shooting down of his plane sparked a civil war that resulted in the deaths of 800 000 Rwandans.

The course of the conflict

A variety of extremist groups from the Presidential Guard, Hutu militias and the Rwandan military joined in the genocide – a vicious attempt to remove all Tutsis from Rwanda by murdering them. It should be noted that the slaughter was perpetrated by Hutu **extremists** against both Tutsis and **moderate** Hutus – and, indeed, among the first victims were moderate Hutu politicians, including the prime minister, who were killed in order to make way for the extreme nationalist Hutu faction.

The genocide spread with unprecedented violence and speed: 800 000 people were killed in 100 days. The killings started in the capital of Kigali after Hutus set up road blocks and demanded to see ID cards, which showed people's ethnicities. Those identified as Tutsis were killed immediately, often with machetes. Hutu husbands killed their Tutsi wives out of fear for their own lives and thousands of Tutsi women were captured and held as sex slaves. At the later trials of the Rwandan Hutus, it was ruled that the mass rapes were a part of the genocide.

The slaughter was also highly coordinated. At the beginning of the conflict, hit lists of political opponents were drawn up and the youth wing of the ruling party – the National Republican Movement for Democracy and Development – was delegated the job of carrying out the slaughter. This group numbered about 30 000 and was called the *Interahamwe*, which translates into English as 'those who attack together'. Ordinary civilians also participated in the murders. Neighbour turned against neighbour, Hutu against Tutsi.

extremist

People who hold extreme political or religious views and advocate violent or illegal action

moderate

In politics, a person who holds balanced views



By 4 July 1994, a Tutsi rebel army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front, managed to overrun Kigali. Their invasion meant more slaughter. The victims this time were the extremists who had perpetrated the initial massacre. By this time, nearly 75 per cent of the Tutsis within Rwanda had been murdered.

The end of the conflict created a massive refugee crisis, as two million people, mostly Hutus, fled into neighbouring Zaire (now the Democratic Republic of the Congo). The Tutsis now held power and declared a ceasefire. The presence of the Hutus in the Congo led to much conflict there, and this led to five million more deaths in the following decade.

The role of media in inciting anti-Tutsi hatred

Radio played a significant role in the slaughter in Rwanda. Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM) was established in June 1993 and produced anti-Tutsi propaganda on a daily basis. Funded by Hutu extremists and directed at a population that was illiterate, it demonised the Tutsi community. When the genocide commenced, radio presenters read out the names of people to be targeted for murder and gave instructions about how to kill.

Likewise, the *Kangura* newspaper incited hatred against the Tutsis. The mouthpiece for the extremist Hutu groups, it created the 'Hutu Ten Commandments', in which moderate Hutus who married, did business with or associated with Tutsis were deemed traitors against Rwanda. Although the paper had ceased publication by the time of the April 1994 genocide, it had a prominent role in shaping the attitudes of many of the killers. Hassan Ngeze was the owner, founder and editor of the newspaper, and he faced trial in October 2000.

In October 2000, the so-called 'Media case' was held at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. Ferdinand Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza were executives at RTLM who embarked on a propaganda campaign to label Tutsis as the enemy of Rwanda and moderate Hutus as accomplices. Nahimana was Director of the Office of Information and Barayagwiza was Director of Political Affairs at the Foreign Ministry in Rwanda.

On December 2003, Ngeze, Nahimana and Barayagwiza were found guilty of genocide, conspiracy to commit genocide, direct and public incitement to commit genocide, and persecution and extermination as crimes against humanity.



SOURCE 5.11 Ferdinand Nahimana (left) was an RTLM executive and Hassan Ngeze (right) was the owner of the *Kangura* newspaper. In 2003, the UN criminal court for Rwanda found them guilty of using 'hate media' to incite the killings of up to a million people during the 1994 genocide. They received life prison sentences. →



SOURCE A

The newspaper and the radio explicitly and repeatedly, in fact relentlessly, targeted the Tutsi population for destruction. Demonizing the Tutsis as having inherently evil qualities, equating the ethnic group with 'the enemy' and portraying its women as seductive enemy agents, the media called for the extermination of the Tutsi ethnic group as a response to the political threat they associated with Tutsi ethnicity.

Verdict in the 'Media case' of executives from RTLM and *Kangura*, at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, 2003

SOURCE B

Rwanda media have been accused of inciting the hatred that led to violence by using an ethnic framework to report what was essentially a political struggle. They also have been accused of spreading fear, rumor, and panic by using a kill-or-be-killed frame, and of relaying directives about the necessity of killing the Tutsi people as well as instructions on how to do it.

CL Kellow and HL Steeves, 'The role of radio in the Rwandan genocide', *Journal of Communication*, Vol. 48, Issue 3, 1998

QUESTIONS

- 1 According to Source A, what role did the media have in the genocide?
- 2 Use Source B to explain what 'frames' were used to incite hatred against Tutsis.

Did the United Nations do enough to prevent the genocide?

The United Nations has received sustained criticism for not intervening in the Rwandan conflict once the killing commenced. The UN had been present in Rwanda since October 1993, when the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR) was established. UN commanders on the ground were instructed not to get involved in conflict, and their role was strictly as a peacekeeping mission.

By 1994, there were already significant sensitivities in the West about involvement in conflicts in Africa. In October 1993, two United States Black Hawk helicopters were shot down in Mogadishu, Somalia. This ultimately led to the US leaving the region and to Somalia becoming a safe haven for Islamic terrorist groups. At the beginning of the conflict in Rwanda, 10 Belgian troops were murdered, prompting the Belgians to leave the area.

The UN has since acknowledged its failure. An independent inquiry into the UN's role during the conflict was tabled in December 1999. It found:

“The failure of the United Nations to prevent, and subsequently, to stop the genocide in Rwanda was a failure by the United Nations system as a whole. The fundamental failure was the lack of resources and political commitment devoted to developments in Rwanda and to the United Nations presence there. There was a persistent lack of political will by Member States to act, or to act with enough assertiveness.”

Independent Inquiry [S/1999/1257] into the Role of the United Nations in Rwanda in 1994,
www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1999/1257

The Canadian Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire was the UN commander in charge on the ground. Since his retirement, he has expressed great remorse for the failings of the UN mission in Rwanda.



Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire recalls Rwanda

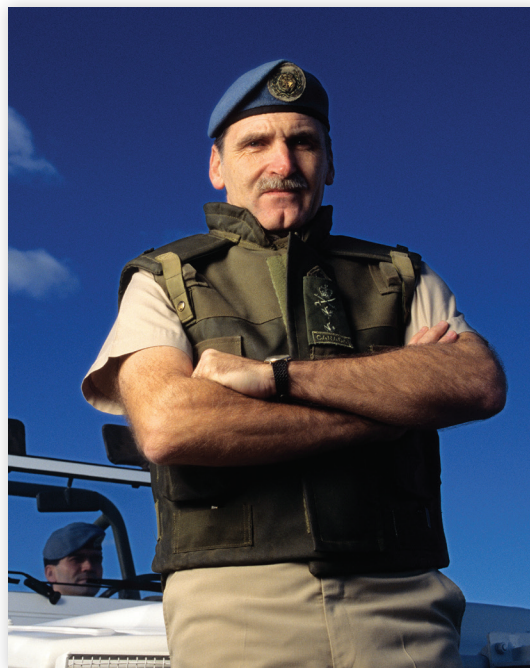
SOURCE A

It took me seven years to finally have the desire, the willpower and the stamina to begin to describe in detail the events of that year in Rwanda. To recount, from my insider's point of view, how a country moved from the promise of a certain peace to intrigue, the fomenting of racial hatred, assassinations, civil war and genocide. And how the international community, through an inept UN mandate and what can only be described as indifference, self-interest and racism, aided and abetted these crimes against humanity – how we all helped create the mess that has murdered and displaced millions and destabilized the whole central African region.

SOURCE B

I know that I will never end my mourning for all those Rwandans who placed their faith in us, who thought the UN peacekeeping force was there to stop extremism, to stop the killings and help them through the perilous journey to a lasting peace. That mission, UNAMIR, failed. I know intimately the cost in human lives of the inflexible UN Security Council mandate, the penny-pinching financial management of the mission, the UN red tape, the political manipulations and my own personal limitations. What I have come to realize as the root of it all, however, is the fundamental indifference of the world community to the plight of seven to eight million black Africans in a tiny country that had no strategic or resource value to any world power.

(Sources A and B) Roméo Dallaire, *Shake Hands with the Devil: The Failure of Humanity in Rwanda*, Arrow Books, London, 2003, pp. 5–6



SOURCE 5.12 Canadian Lieutenant-General Roméo Dallaire was commander of the United Nations forces in Rwanda during the genocide. He has since been highly critical of the UN and says it is partly to blame for the genocide.

QUESTIONS

- 1 Read Source A and answer the following questions.
 - a What does Dallaire want to recount in his book?
 - b What reasons does he give for partly blaming the international community for the crimes against humanity?
 - c What has been the outcome of the Rwandan genocide?
- 2 Read Source B and answer the following questions.
 - a What is Dallaire's attitude towards the UN mission?
 - b In Dallaire's view, why did the mission fail?
 - c What does Dallaire say is the root of it all?
- 3 How useful are Sources A and B for a historian studying the conflict in Rwanda? In your answer, you should discuss perspective and reliability.



The United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda

Since the United Nations established the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda in November 1994, it has indicted 93 people for genocide. Those indicted included a variety of high-ranking officials, military and militia leaders, politicians, media owners, and business and religious leaders. The crimes with which they were charged included a range of crimes against humanity, such as genocide, mass rape and murder.

The court was located at Arusha, in Tanzania, where a detention facility was set up in May 1996 to house those awaiting trial. The first trial, that of Jean-Paul Akayesu, began in January 1997. In October of the same year, Akayesu was found guilty of genocide. This first judgment was to be a significant step in bringing perpetrators to justice, and would lay the groundwork for prosecutions in other conflicts. The court made several landmark decisions, including the following:

- It was the first international court to rule on genocide since the 1948 UN Conventions defined the term.
- It was the first international court to recognise that mass rape represented a form of genocide.
- It held the media to account for spreading hate-filled messages about the Tutsis, and concluded that this played a significant part in fanning the flames of the genocide.

In July 1997, seven suspects were detained in Nairobi in Kenya, including a former Rwandan prime minister, Jean Kambanda. This showed the international reach of the program. Countries around the world signed a treaty to extradite suspected criminals back to Arusha to face trial. In May 1998, Kambanda pleaded guilty – the first to do so. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in the following September.

In order to prosecute effectively, the court provided special assistance to the survivors and witnesses, many of whom had experienced extreme trauma as a result of the war. The Rwanda trials became an important landmark in international criminal law. They showed that the UN was willing to put all of its resources behind bringing the perpetrators to justice. At the time of writing, there are still eight Rwandan fugitives awaiting capture and trial.

- 1 Outline the criticisms of the United Nations over its handling of the genocide in 1994.
- 2 To what extent were the sensitivities of the international community about remaining in Rwanda justification for not intervening when the genocide started?
- 3 Explain the attitude of both the United Nations and Roméo Dallaire to the failure of the UN mission in Rwanda.
- 4 Identify the landmark rulings that came out of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for the future of prosecuting genocide.

The United Nations in Timor-Leste, 1999–2001

The United Nations was instrumental in bringing Timor-Leste (or East Timor) its independence in May 2002, and helping the young nation take its seat as the 191st member state of the UN General Assembly. The country had a long history of Portuguese colonial rule. When that ended in 1974, Indonesia invaded the country, annexed it as its 27th province and ruled it for the next 25 years. At the same time as the invasion, the left-leaning East Timorese political party Fretilin declared its





independence, leading to a long civil war between the East Timorese nationalist movement and the Indonesians. The United States backed the Indonesian military in the war.

Background

The Armed Forces for the National Liberation of East Timor was the paramilitary wing of the Fretilin party and was led by Xanana Gusmão. The Indonesians jailed Gusmão for life for subversion in 1993, but in 2002 he became Timor-Leste's first president. In 1996, another resistance leader, José Ramos-Horta, who was the leader in exile during the Indonesian occupation, was jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize with Dili's Catholic bishop, Carlos Filipe Ximenes Belo, for their human rights work in East Timor. The award brought further international attention to East Timor's struggle for independence.

Indonesian President Suharto – who had ruled for 30 years – had long resisted calls for East Timorese autonomy, fearing that an independence movement in East Timor would lead to instability in other regions of Indonesia. When a new president, BJ Habibie, was elected in 1998 after Suharto's resignation, he was more sympathetic to the idea of an independent East Timor. Indonesia was reeling from the Asian financial crisis and could barely afford the military commitment to forestall the pro-independence forces. The Australian government had supported moves for more autonomy, and the Indonesian military was spending vast sums of money maintaining its rule.

Course of the conflict

During 1999, a number of key events led to an increasing level of violence. On 5 May it was announced that the East Timorese would be given a referendum to vote for their independence. The vote was set to take place on 30 August, and it was to be administered by the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNMET).

Earlier that year, in an atmosphere of reform, Gusmão was released from an Indonesian prison and placed under house arrest in East Timor. When it became clear that anti-independence forces would attempt to disrupt the referendum and its preparations, Gusmão ordered pro-independence forces to resume their struggle. In the lead-up to the vote, skirmishes broke out between pro-Indonesian forces, trying to intimidate UN forces, and East Timorese civilians. In a number of clashes between April and July 1999, East Timorese were murdered by paramilitary groups. East Timorese leaders such as Gusmão accused Indonesia of training and funding the groups. Threats flew both ways as pro-independence forces promised tit-for-tat retaliation.

The violence could not dampen the demands of the East Timorese for their independence. On 30 August 1999, 98 per cent of East Timorese turned out to vote on the question of whether to remain a part of Indonesia or begin a process towards independence. Of them, 21.5 per cent voted to remain integrated with Indonesia while 78.5 per cent voted for independence.

Ordinary Indonesians were shocked by the vote and blamed the UN and Australia for encouraging the outcome. The vote sparked widespread violence in the country, as Dili came under attack from pro-integration Indonesian forces. Catholic churches and the International Red Cross were attacked, foreign journalists left the country and thousands of East Timorese fled into the mountains. Nearly 1000 civilians were killed in the initial violence, and up to 25 per cent of East Timor's 450 000-strong population fled to West Timor.

Indonesia was condemned internationally for refusing to step in and end the violence, and it later emerged that the pro-integration militias were supported by elements within the Indonesian security forces. Australia rallied the UN to allow an Australian-led international peacekeeping mission into East Timor to bring calm to the situation. Under threat of economic sanctions, and still reeling from the Asian financial crisis, Indonesia withdrew its troops on 12 September – but not without violence.





AP Photo/Rob Elliott; Pool



SOURCE 5.13 Australian General Peter Cosgrove commanded the UN-sponsored INTERFET force in East Timor before handing over to the UN mission.

Getty Images/CANDIDO ALVES/Stranger



SOURCE 5.14 Xanana Gusmão was elected the first President of East Timor in May 2002.

One Indonesian army battalion left a trail of destruction, including the deaths of dozens of East Timorese villagers, during its withdrawal.

On 15 September 1999, UN Resolution 1264 was adopted, allowing an international peacekeeping force to be stationed in East Timor to stop further deterioration of the situation. Before a UN force could get there, the Australian General Peter Cosgrove was placed in command of the International Force for East Timor (INTERFET), an outfit of 5500 mainly Australian troops, until the UN could assemble a force. The Indonesian parliament also recognised the outcome of the referendum. In the following month, the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET) was established to ensure that the result of the independence vote was carried out.

Throughout late 1999 and into 2000, pro-Indonesian militias continued to carry out attacks in East Timor, and many people escaped into West Timor to evade capture. In a period of escalating violence, in September 2000, the United Nations withdrew some of its staff from West Timor after three of its agency workers were murdered. The killers were sentenced to a lenient 20 months in prison for the crime, sparking international outrage.

Despite the ongoing violence, the momentum for nation building was growing. In July 2001, East Timor received an economic boost when an agreement with Australia granted 90 per cent of gas and oil revenues in the Timor Sea to East Timor. The following month, an 88-member assembly was elected to carry out the task of drafting a new constitution for East Timor, which was set up as a democratic republic with a president and parliament.

Despite these gains, the violence in the aftermath of the independence vote still had to be dealt with. In January

2002, a truth and reconciliation committee was set up and the Indonesians set up a human rights court to hold the military accountable for the violence that followed the independence vote.

In April 2002, Xanana Gusmão was elected President of East Timor, and in May the UN Security Council set up the UN Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMSET) to help East Timorese authorities establish their new nation. On 20 May 2002, East Timor achieved its independence, to celebrations in the capital, Dili. Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri and former US President Bill Clinton joined in the handing-over ceremony.

In September 2002, East Timor became the 191st member of the United Nations.

The role of the United Nations in Timor-Leste

The United Nations established a number of missions in Timor-Leste in order to give a framework for the independence vote, provide peacekeeping operations in the aftermath of the vote, and help to transition the country to a democratic republic.

The first of these was Security Council Resolution 1246, which established the United Nations Missions in East Timor (UNAMET). The principal function of this resolution was to administer the





independence vote. The resolution stipulated that, should the East Timorese people vote in favour of independence, the mission would be extended to help them transition to peace. The same resolution allowed the non-UN, Australian-led INTERFET force to immediately deploy peacekeepers in light of the escalating levels of violence. A part of the resolution was aimed at highlighting the increasing human rights violations by pro-Indonesian militias.

The second resolution, Security Council Resolution 1272, was passed on 25 October 1999 and established the UN Transitional Administration in East Timor (UNTAET). The resolution gave executive and legislative power to UNTAET during the transition from vote to full independence. A draft constitution needed to be drawn up and elections for a parliament and a president held. The resolution also set up a justice mechanism for human rights violations. This was the International Commission of Inquiry on East Timor (ICIET), which investigated and prosecuted violence following the independence vote. These investigations led to the creation of a number of special UN-backed panels to deal with the violence, including the International Commission of Inquiry on East Timor, the UN's Serious Crimes Investigation Unit and the Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor. The UN was clearly determined not to see the violence of 1999 go unpunished.

After May 2002, when independence was achieved, the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor (UNMISET) was established by Security Council Resolution 1410 to support and promote political and administrative stability, to provide law enforcement and train a new East Timorese police and security force, and to assist with external security threats.



- 1 What challenges did the United Nations face in East Timor between 1999 and 2002?
- 2 Explain the forces that led to Indonesia accepting an East Timorese vote for independence in 1999.
- 3 How did the United Nations attempt to deal with the violence that followed the vote?
- 4 How successful was the UN mission to Timor-Leste?



Reuters/Darren Whiteside

SOURCE 5.15 United Nations election workers count votes after Timor Leste's first democratic election in Dili, 31 August 2001.

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Conclusion

The United Nations was able to carry out its Charter much more effectively without being hindered by superpower rivalry. But this sudden rise in international workload did not come without its challenges. In the three and a half years between 1991 and 1994, the UN completed as many peacekeeping missions as it had in the previous 40 years, during the Cold War.

One of the biggest challenges was that the nature of conflict changed significantly. No longer were threats to international peace and security merely between nation-states, but intrastate conflict fuelled humanitarian crises that called for UN intervention. The UN had to send in troops to protect aid workers delivering urgent food and medical aid, as well as cope with displacement and provide safe havens for those under threat.

The role and influence of the UN reached its high point in the 1990s, but after 2001 and the beginning of the United States-led 'global war on terror', the UN was sidelined once again, as the Americans adopted an increasingly militaristic and unilateral foreign policy. Although the UN has done much to help in the developing world through children's rights, education, health and food aid, it has been largely ineffective in countering threats to international peace and security – especially when non-traditional forms of conflict are concerned.

Chapter summary

- The United Nations had a much larger role in maintaining peace and security in the post-Cold War period.
- Peacekeeping missions brought the principle of state sovereignty into focus as the UN intervened in a series of disputes in which nations were violating human rights.
- The character of UN involvement changed again, as the United States and its allies bypassed the UN Security Council and General Assembly in their prosecution of the 'war on terror'.
- The UN had mixed success in its operations around the world.

Further resources

- 'An agenda for peace', June 1992, www.un-documents.net/a47-277.htm.
- O'Neill, JT, and Rees, N, *United Nations Peacekeeping in the Post-Cold War Era*, Routledge, London, 2005.

Endnotes

- ¹ United Nations, 'An agenda for peace', June 1992, www.un-documents.net/a47-277.htm.
- ² Mahmood, Othman O, *The Root Causes of the United Nations' Failure in Somalia*, iUniverse, Bloomington, 2011, p. xx.

CHAPTER REVIEW

- 1 To what extent were the 1990s a mix of failure and success for the United Nations?
- 2 Outline some of the positive work of the UN in developing countries during the 1990s.
- 3 To what extent did American unilateralism mark a shift in the UN after 2003?
- 4 In a globalised world, is the concept of state sovereignty as strong as it was?
- 5 Outline the key operations of the UN in peacekeeping, humanitarian aid and international law.
- 6 For your case study:
 - a Outline the key historical forces that led to the conflict.
 - b Explain the motives and actions of the various groups involved in the conflict.
 - c Make a timeline of the key events in the conflict.
 - d Evaluate the role and actions of the United Nations in the conflict.