

Functionalist Peacekeeping

Jack Jensen - 2015

Functionalism as an explanation of international relations and a prescription for achieving international peace suffers unfairly from its age. The most important works of functionalist scholarship are from the 1960s and 1970s, before the Cold War ended and before peacekeeping became a main activity of the United Nations. In the absence of constructivism and with neorealism and neoliberalism still a decade away, functionalism sought to take on the doctrine of classical realism single-handedly to provide an operational roadmap to the goals of the young United Nations. This made functionalist writers dismissive of the role that militaristic endeavors could serve in the upkeep of a functionalist peace system; what Groom and Taylor's *Functionalism* calls a "threat system."¹ For classical functionalists, the road to peace is through "economic, social, technical, and humanitarian matters"²; never militaristic ones. But it was in defense of these concerns that armed peacekeeping ever came into common usage. The justification for UN peacekeeping as it exists today and prescriptions for its improvement in the 21st century lurk in the penumbra of functionalism, even as its writers empathetically reject the use of force.

Functionalists were never shy about their desire to turn the United Nations into a vehicle for functionalist peace. An effective functionalist peace organization would maximize integration of interests on an international scale, leading Ernst Haas to say that functionalists "insist that this kind of organization be at least akin to the species represented by the United Nations."³ Functionalism had its origins in the development of the League of Nations, and had from its start been very concerned with a powerful, participatory organization to enable integration between countries. To functionalists, the failure of the League was in its lack of commitment to

¹ Groom, *Functionalism* (1975): page 95

² Claude, *Swords Into Plowshares* (1964): page 378

³ Haas, *Beyond The Nation-State* (1964): page 87

integration and the lack of integrative pressure creating linkages between perceived interests.⁴

The United Nations offered a new opportunity to enshrine integrative functions that could begin to permeate international norms and build a functionalist peace. As Paul Taylor says, “Many of the specialized agencies of the United Nations reflect functionalist thinking and they can be seen as part of a functionalist strategy for obtaining world peace.”⁵

To many functionalists, the best suited UN organs for functionalism were those within the Economic and Social Council. Said T.V. Sathyamurthy, “A whole new genre of activities was thus inspired by the conviction that functionalism is an important and continuing component of any theory of viable, enduring, and dynamic peace ... the main political organs of the United Nations would be seized with the immediate problems affecting political peace [while] autonomous specialized agencies, working under the coordinating influence of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC), would function in their particular technical spheres of competence.”⁶ These agencies would align with common interests between states and give policy cooperation a foothold from which cooperation in one area could spill over into cooperation in other areas “by allowing cross-cutting loyalties, by developing sub-ordinate goals, by removing barriers to intercourse and by creating a sense of society through fulfilling a necessary function.”⁷ So successful was functionalism in shaping the goals of the ECOSOC bodies that “legally these agencies are known as specialized agencies, but they are often referred to as the functional agencies.”⁸ ECOSOC thus became the home turf of functionalists within the UN, and the level of

⁴ Victor-Yves Ghebali, *Functionalism* (1975): page 141

⁵ Groom, *Functionalism* (1975): page 87

⁶ Sathyamurthy, *Twenty years of UNESCO; an Interpretation* (1967): page 615

⁷ Groom, *Functionalism* (1975): pages 94-95

⁸ Willetts, *The Cardoso Report on the UN and Civil Society: Functionalism, Global Corporatism, or Global Democracy?* (2006): page 312

attention that other UN organs devoted to its activities was an important metric by which functionalist scholars like Sathyamurthy, Weiss, and Siotis judge UN leadership. By the height of functionalist scholarship, national interests were rapidly becoming international interests and the UN had become the best-positioned global force to link such interests within its institutions. Said Richard W. Van Wagenen in 1965, “the UN is a community-building institution ... there is a new realization that many things which have to be done cannot be done on a less-than-global basis, among them the regulation of transport and communication, the control of outer space, the control of disease, and above all the control of massive armed conflict.”⁹

Functionalism’s Armed Conflict Dilemma

The emphasis on preventing armed conflict particularly is not a casual one. Groom states obliquely in his first sentence on functionalism as a peace system that “the prime prescriptive concern of functionalists is to eliminate war.”¹⁰ Yet in Ines Claude’s introduction to *The Functional Approach to Peace*, he says that “functional activities are immediately and explicitly concerned with such values as prosperity, welfare, social justice, and the ‘good life,’ rather than the prevention of war.”¹¹ This disconnect is critical to the strength of functionalist peace and whether or not the UN is an embodiment of it. Functionalists would rejoin that there is no disconnect; that “the separability of economic and social problems from political problems is only provisional, and they are ultimately inseparable,”¹² and that “it was recognized by those who worked out the details of the UN structure that social and economic imbalances, like political and power imbalances between different parts of the world, could seriously jeopardize

⁹ Van Wagenen, *The Concept of Community and the Future of the United Nations* (1965): page 813

¹⁰ Groom, *Functionalism* (1975): page 98

¹¹ Claude, *Swords Into Plowshares* (1964): page 378

¹² *Ibid.*, page 385

world peace.”¹³ The argument that economic and social cooperation will inevitably spill over into political cooperation allows functionalists to focus on the former methods of cooperation and their corresponding UN organs and not dirty their hands with grizzly, militaristic, realist matters.

Functionalism’s deafness to militaristic concerns is remarkably profound. None of the standard-bearing functionalist scholars ever offer a direct critique of armed peacekeeping, even though it has been a doctrinal aspect of UN activity since 1956, when armed peacekeepers supervised the withdrawal of European and Israeli troops from Egypt during the Suez Crisis. The most direct source of tacit approval for peacekeeping comes from functionalist praise of Dag Hammarskjold. Thomas Weiss and Jean Siotis note Hammarskjold’s respect for the importance of functionalist objectives in peacekeeping, quoting him saying that “even the ultimate UN authority in preventing conflict ‘will depend also on the solution of the underlying economic and social problems that are behind the pressures leading to international conflicts’.”¹⁴ Only as recently as 2011 was I able to find the admission that “The provision of security to [functional] spaces could come from a variety of forms, including Private Military Firms or peacekeeping forces,”¹⁵ this said in relation to peacekeepers as stabilizing functionalist forces in Darfur and the former Yugoslavia.

Yet functionalism is constantly discussing armed conflict as a principal source of immediate dysfunction to be stopped. Part of Groom’s critique of the state system is that it fails to provide effective security, and that functionalist interests must “circumvent” state interests, implying that at some point a functionalist organization must provide direct sources of security:

¹³ Sathyamurthy, *Twenty years of UNESCO; an Interpretation* (1967): page 615

¹⁴ Weiss & Siotis *Functionalism* (1975): page 176

¹⁵ Steele, *Revisiting Classical Functional Theory: Towards a Twenty-First Century Micro-Politics* (2011): page 34

“not only will the diffusion and cross-cutting of loyalties make conflict less likely (because it is more dysfunctional) but the state, insofar as it no longer fulfills a function, will ‘wither away’.”¹⁶

Fredrich Kratochwil and John Ruggie also describe the functionalist desire for international organizations to actively combat expanding, global systemic problems in the wake of state interests, saying that during the Cold War “the jurisdictional scope of both the state and existing international organizations was increasingly outstripped by the functional scope of international problems. [Functionalists] sought to explore the extent to which institutional adaptations to this fact might be conducive to the emergence of political forms ‘beyond the nation state.’

Neofunctionalists assigned a major role in this process to international organizations, not simply as passive recipients of new tasks and authority but as active agents of ‘task expansion’ and ‘spillover’.”¹⁷ Even David Mitrany, the founder of Functionalism in the 1930s, was not above security means to meet security ends. In a discussion of Mitrany, B. J. Steele brings up that “Even though Mitrany was proposing a ‘working peace system’, his was not ... a ‘pacifist perspective’. Two forms of coercive protection were allowed by Mitrany – a domestic police force and an international surveillance function provided by an international police force. Mitrany is cautious here, as he calls the latter ‘an important anachronism without an international authority’.”¹⁸

Peacekeeping as an Integrative Endeavor of the United Nations

This authority is now more than ever in the hands of the United Nations. Van Wagenen describes a functionalist “benign spiral” that “carries that sense of community to a point where

¹⁶ Groom, *Functionalism* (1975): page 100

¹⁷ Kratochwil & Ruggie, *International Organization: A State of the Art on an Art of the State* (1986): page 757

¹⁸ Steele, *Revisiting Classical Functional Theory: Towards a Twenty-First Century Micro-Politics* (2011): page 34

the institutions gradually grow strong enough to support enforceable law. Such authority, in turn, may be able to check war, the greatest of dangers to man at the present time. The UN is the nearest thing we have to a global political institution. Therefore, to strengthen the UN in structure and function is to provide community building authority.”¹⁹ Under this authority, Mitrany’s international police force is justified, and in the United Nation’s peacekeeping it is made manifest. Functionalists of the 1960s and 1970s had resigned themselves to apolitical matters not because they believed that functionalism was incompatible with political ones, but because the Cold War had entrenched realism and state interests beyond what functionalism in the UN could confidently overcome. It makes sense that as the UN’s powers have expanded and that as the bipolar world order in which most functionalists wrote has faded away, functionalist ideas could begin to be applied more to the political realm. As early as 1967, T.V. Sathyamurthy was able to describe this process, saying that:

While the energies of the Great Powers have been utilized in containing each other's nuclear power and ideological expansion and also in strengthening the UN, the UN itself has become, by slow stages, an indispensable peacekeeping agency. Its first major achievement in this field lay in Suez ... In the Congo the scope of the peacekeeping *functions* of the UN was expanded to include the activities of normal national governments. The specialized agencies ... were brought into action with a view to filling the vacuum created by the total breakdown of government and order during the worst years of the crisis while at the same time the forces of the UN Operation in the Congo (ONUC) themselves were fighting the rebels and maintaining law and order. The UN has thus played an important role in bringing about a shift of emphasis from containment to cease-fire and peacekeeping. Its peacekeeping functions have invested the UN with the permanent responsibility of ‘a quietly helpful ... third party’ in any conflict not directly involving a clash of great-power interests. Not a single eruption of international violence during the last ten years has managed to escape the notice, concern, and involvement of the UN or its ministrations²⁰

¹⁹ Van Wagenen, *The Concept of Community and the Future of the United Nations* (1965): page 813

²⁰ Sathyamurthy, *Twenty years of UNESCO; an Interpretation* (1967): pages 626-627

Since the end of the Cold War, the sources of dysfunctional conflict have been freed from bipolar great power interests, making their resolution an interest of most states. Peacekeeping is therefore a functional endeavor, linking and reaffirming commitment to global security to create integration, spillover, and influence political issues as well as economic and social ones.

Groom wrote of the emergence of peacekeeping in the 1970s that “the UN has developed and retains a peacekeeping capability that responds to a felt need ... super-power consensus growing out of an emergent common interest ... using peacekeeping as a means for controlling the ‘instabilities’ of the [third world].”²¹ During the early years of the UN, these common interests were achieved infrequently because of hostility between super-powers limiting functional linkages between blocs, but during 1970s detente and after the Cold War ended altogether, emergent common interests made peacekeeping an attractive guarantor of functional stability. Peacekeeping was neither an extension of the Cold War threat system, since it was excluded from the disputes of bipolar power conflicts, nor was it a manifestation of collective security. UN forces can be used to de-escalate a conflict instigated by an aggressor state in a moment of collective security under the UN’s Chapter VII, but Chapter VI peacekeeping requires the consent of all affected parties and does not try to put down threats through overwhelming force.²² By responding to many small threats with small commitments of force, peacekeeping overcomes one of John Mearsheimer’s main objections to collective security- that it cannot handle multiple aggressors²³, and by binding itself to a limited set of circumstances for action and a limited mandate of acceptable actions once on the ground, peacekeeping overcomes his other main objection- that no states would trust collective security measures enough to

²¹ Groom, *Peacekeeping: Perspectives and Progress* (1971): page 353

²² Claude, *Swords Into Plowshares* (1964): page 258

²³ Mearsheimer, *The False Promise of International Institutions* (1994): pages 28-29

commit to them.²⁴ Peacekeeping is then an international security measure that is free from the downfalls of collective security and is suited to address functions that go beyond the function of stopping aggressive states. As William Durch says, “peacekeeping evolved as an alternative to the collective security that the UN was designed to provide but could not.”²⁵

The range of functions that peacekeeping has met and the levels of participation in operations further shows the integrative potential of functionalist peacekeeping. The functions that Sathyamurthy described: “filling the vacuum created by the total breakdown of government and order ... fighting the rebels and maintaining law and order ... bringing about a shift of emphasis from containment to cease-fire and peacekeeping,”²⁶ and the other regular goals of peacekeeping including de-escalating conflicts, overseeing elections, rebuilding failed states, assisting humanitarian efforts, monitoring human rights, and directing disaster relief are all functions that the UN community wants met and that a responsive force on the ground could be equipped to meet. While the actions of more traditional functionalist organs under ECOSOC address systemic dysfunctionality, the immediate dysfunctions of regional instability and crises demand immediate action that the UN is best suited to identify and that peacekeepers are best suited to provide. Said Groom, “if the cause of the conflict can be located, and if the continuation of the conflict is considered to be more costly than altering the present policy of the system, then the conflict is perceived to be dysfunctional.”²⁷ The commitments of UN countries, cooperation of parties affected by peacekeeping missions, and the codified mandates of those missions serve as affirmations of regimental norms by the UN, which are disseminated in the regions that these

²⁴ Ibid., pages 29-31

²⁵ Durch, *Building on Sand: UN Peacekeeping in the Western Sahara* (1993): page 151

²⁶ Sathyamurthy, *Twenty years of UNESCO; an Interpretation* (1967): pages 627

²⁷ Groom, *Functionalism* (1975): page 101

missions target and among the countries that commit personnel “which ... provide functional and micro-political benefits”²⁸ and grease the wheels of international integration.

Problems For Peacekeeping

This is not to say that peacekeeping has been a particularly successful functionalist endeavor, only that peacekeeping is in fact a theoretical application of functionalism in the realm of armed security. All of the usual critiques leveled against peacekeeping can be leveled against peacekeeping as functionalism: a lack of commitment from contributing UN states, a confused or unachievable mandate, or a loss of cooperation from the states that a peacekeeping mission is designed to help are all failures from a functionalist perspective. Lack of commitment shows that the functional norms tying state interests to a cause are weak or that the cause at hand is a poor function of shared interests. An unworkable mandate is a failure of the UN to coherently identify and articulate functional outcomes and provide clear means to reach them. And a loss of cooperation demonstrates that problem states are not willing to change their policies to fall into line with functional expectations of their neighbors, citizens, or the international community.

Durch’s critique of the UN’s MINURSO mission in West Sahara shows such a failure; where a dysfunctional conflict was identified by the international community, an operation was designed to link interests between the affected parties while also instilling democratic and nonviolent norms, but goals were frustrated on the ground by a lack of international commitment, an untenable mandate, and an uncooperative state of Morocco. An improvement on any of these fronts could have helped overcome the other obstacles, but the combination of discouraging factors created a downward spiral of lowered expectations; a sort of negative

²⁸ Steele, *Revisiting Classical Functional Theory: Towards a Twenty-First Century Micro-Politics* (2011): page 34

spillover effect. Morocco could have been made cooperative by international attention encouraging its leadership to pursue policies favorable to the UN, or could have been made cooperative by a peacekeeping force with an empowering mandate equipped to punish breaches of the UN ceasefire. The MINURSO mandate would have been workable if Morocco had not worked so hard to stymie its work, or if the UN had been willing to give it resources sufficient to overcome Moroccan obstructions. And the international community would have deepened its commitment if Moroccan participation had shortened the amount of time needed to fulfill UN objectives or if the mandate had been focused enough for it to have required fewer extensions of resources. Without any of these, the mission was unable to move forward, but it at least did not give ground by acquiescing to Moroccan attempts to coopt the referendum process, which would have allowed Moroccan state interests to overcome regional functional interests and undermine the UN and its peacekeeping as agents of functionalist integration.²⁹

Other writers on functionalism have identified similar impediments to peacekeeping that have harmed its potential for functionalist integration. Groom stated that “peacekeeping negotiations and discussions have taken place in a climate of dissension. The crisis over the Congo Operation (ONUC) was but a symptom of a deeper political malaise which reflected differing conceptions of the role of the UN,”³⁰ and Brent Steele’s case studies in Iraq, Israel, and the former Yugoslavia all contain examples of functionalist shortcomings and prescriptions for their improvement.³¹ Groom, Steele, and Durch all stress the importance of maintaining the support of great powers with the ability to overcome the operational difficulties that these

²⁹ Durch, *Building on Sand: UN Peacekeeping in the Western Sahara* (1993): pages 169-171

³⁰ Groom, *Peacekeeping: Perspectives and Progress* (1971): page 343

³¹ Steele, *Revisiting Classical Functional Theory: Towards a Twenty-First Century Micro-Politics* (2011): pages 28-32

functionalist missions can incur, and of the necessity to preserve “the UN's credibility, which UN officials and member states alike believe to be limited and fragile.”³² But these writers also point out the potential that peacekeeping can have to enable integration through functionalist activity. John W. Burton discusses how “in Cyprus, the peacekeeping role of the UN has, over many years, enabled functional customs ... [and] elements of functional cooperation generally, within the framework established during conflict.”³³ If peacekeeping is going to be revived as a worthwhile use of force by the UN, it will be because it is able to successfully take into account functionalist goals and incorporate them into operations to strengthen peacekeeping missions and create better and more long-lasting outcomes.

Conclusion

Faith in peacekeeping as a method for the UN to create international peace is extremely low today, in a vicious cycle of underfunding and underperformance that has persisted since the 1990s. But if achieving peace is an important aspect of the United Nations mandate, as so many functionalist scholars have insisted, then peacekeeping is a worthwhile endeavor to be revived under wiser acumen. The failures of peacekeeping are understandable on a functionalist level, and the functionalist priorities for peacekeeping could prevent those failures in future missions if such priorities informed peacekeeping mandates. A contemporary understanding of functionalism by which to analyze and judge peacekeeping missions could be crucial to achieving a sustainable peace system under the United Nations.

Functionalism was a core theoretical component to the founding of the United Nations and was an important early explanation of the organization's goals. It defined the objectives of

³² Durch, *Building on Sand: UN Peacekeeping in the Western Sahara* (1993): page 154

³³ Groom, *Functionalism* (1975): page 248

ECOSOC during the Cold War, and was a vital alternative peace system to the realist peace system kept in place by the Cold War security council. Functionalism has faded from international attention since the end of the Cold War and the rise of neoliberalism and neorealism as the sides in the grand theoretical debate about the role of international organizations. But the end of the Cold War gives hope to functionalist peace like never before and could allow it to expand from ECOSOC into the political realm via peacekeeping. Functionalist perspectives could have crucially underappreciated answers to the dilemmas facing contemporary peacekeeping, even when classical functionalists were hesitant to address peacekeeping at all.

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