

Lowe, Vaughan; Roberts, Adam; Welsh, Jennifer (Hrsg.): *The United Nations Security Council and War. The Evolution of Thought and Practice Since 1945*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2010. ISBN: 978-019-953343-5; 794 S.

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Even though the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) is the key institutions when it comes to war and peace in the world and at the same time one of the most controversial ones as well, there are not many books covering the Security Council as an institution.<sup>1</sup> The volume on „The UN Security Council and War“, based on a seminar series held at Oxford University in 2004 and 2005 and first published in 2008, is certainly one of the most comprehensive books in this area with its 28 chapters, classified along four different aspects of the Security Council: the framework, the role of the Security Council, case studies and the Security Council and the changing character of war, as well as a lengthy appendix of almost one hundred pages.

The editors have chosen an interdisciplinary approach – taking into account not only legal, historical and political aspects but also contributions from practitioners, diplomats, UN personal and military staff; therefore, reflecting „the realities of the Security Council itself, where different worldviews, different interests and different understandings of the UN’s roles all come together in a continuous process in which, at least sometimes, the end product may be more than the sum of the parts.“ (p. 58)

Unfortunately, historians rarely got a word in edgeways; instead there is much emphasis on political and legal aspects – working procedures, collective security, the use of force and peacekeeping. This is not surprising as only three of the thirty-two contributors are historians; the vast majority comes from Political Science and International Relations. Klaas Dykmann rightly states that a historical view is marginalized in the examination of International Organizations as a general phenomenon.<sup>2</sup>

Hence, an interdisciplinary approach, even

though highlighted in the introduction, would have the potential to enrich the predominantly political analyses in this compendium by embedding the Security Council into a wider global historical context. The world and international politics changed fundamentally since the creation of the UNSC in 1945 and the editors aim at presenting „an accurate picture of what the Council has achieved, and not achieved, in regard to the continuing phenomenon of war.“ (p. 2) One cannot help but ask if the picture is complete without reference to major world events, such as decolonization, the rise of human rights, the economic rise of some developing countries, the institutional development of the UN and the Security Council itself. These aspects are, if at all, only mentioned in passing.

Accordingly, the historical part proves to be rather weak (Introduction and E. Luck on the creation of the Security Council and its relevance today).

The editors follow the conventional history of the UN in which the creation of the UN is seen as an expression of worldwide aspirations for a more just and democratic world order.<sup>3</sup> In the introduction the editors state that the Charter’s emphasis on equal rights and self-determination of peoples ensured that the UN was compatible with the cause of decolonization (p. 12). Thus, they completely disregard new perspectives on the ideological origins of the UN, which challenge the simple narratives of the organization’s origins as either the triumph of the idealistic few, like Eleanor Roosevelt, or as the victim of mere Realpolitik.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See for example Edward C. Luck, *UN Security Council. Practice and Promise*, London 2006; David M. Malone, *The UN Security Council: From the Cold War to the 21st Century*, Boulder 2004.

There are, of course, numerous books, collections and articles about the Security Council’s crises, failures, working procedures in one or two specific aspects, mostly, with regard to a particular conflict, threat or humanitarian affair.

<sup>2</sup> Klaas Dykmann: review: Thomas G. Weiss and Sam Daws (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations*, Oxford 2007, in: *H-Soz-u-Kult*, 06.06.2008, <<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/rezensionen/id=10243>>.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Sunil Amrith, Glenda Sluga, *New Histories of the United Nations*, in: *Journal of World History* 19 (2008) 3, pp. 251-274, here p. 253.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 257. Further readings: Sunil Amrith / Glenda

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E. Luck describes the negotiations leading to the creation of the Security Council in great detail, but misses to embed the foundation of the United Nations into the much wider process of the development of international organizations.

Likewise, the particular case studies fall short of the historical specificity of the particular periods of time by too quickly moving forward to the political analysis of interest and only providing a short introduction of facts; even though they are very extensive in scope – ranging from the Korean War in the 1950s (W. Stueck) to the Suez Crisis (R. Louis), Arab-Israeli Wars (B. Jones), Indian-Pakistan Wars (R. Roy-Chaudhury), East Timor (P. Carey with P. Walsh), Iran Iraq War (C. Tripp), Iraq 1991 and 2003 (J. Cockayne and D. Malone), wars in former Yugoslavia (S. Woodward), the Bosnian conflict (R. Smith), the Afghan conflict (G. Dorronsorro), West Africa (Adebajo) and the Security Council's non involvement in wars (J. Dunbabin).

Considering that most of the post-war conflicts have been left unaddressed by the Security Council<sup>5</sup>, J. Dunbabin's article about the non-involvement of the Security Council in wars is especially disappointing. After a short description of what he describes as significant examples of non-involvement and potential nuclear conflicts, he concludes that non-involvement cannot be simply blamed on the Cold War. (p. 499). He not only does not give any further explanations to this statement, but also immediately passes over to the institutional constraints such as the competition from the General Assembly, the veto and the lack of resources as factors for non-involvement of the Security Council. The period after the End of the Cold War does not come out any better. Why he considers the 'new international order' and the changing nature of conflicts as systemic changes is not clear. In order to be able to understand the complex subject matter of non-involvement over time, it is indispensable to provide the specific historical context.

Nonetheless, the individual articles are all very well researched and provide a first overview of the specific topics. In general, they focus on working practices and decision-making in the Council with a strong focus on

collective security in respect of political debates as well as according to international law. Finally, I would like to conclude that despite the above-discussed criticism, the compendium draws a realistic picture of the working practice, chances and constraints as well as the evolving procedures and policies of the Security Council, which should be completed with more critical and historical oriented studies.

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Sluga, *New Histories of the United Nations*; Mark Mazower, *No Enchanted Palace. The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*, Princeton 2009; Mazower sets the creation of the UN in a continuance of British Imperial ideology. A critical review to Mazower: Glenda Sluga, *No Enchanted Palace: The End of Empire and the Ideological Origins of the United Nations*, in: *English Historical Review* CXXV (2010) 516, pp. 1280-1282. See also for an interesting account on how Africans tried to influence the San Francisco conference: Marika Sherwood, „There Is No New Deal for the Blackman in San Francisco“. *African Attempts to Influence the Founding Conference of the United Nations, April-July, 1945*, in: *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 29 (1996) 1, pp. 71-94

<sup>5</sup> Depicted clearly in Appendix 7, a list of armed conflicts and crises from 1945-2006.