Keeping the Peace

by N. D. White

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Reviewed by David Travers

The principal purpose of the United Nations is to maintain international peace through collective security. The Charter of the organisation provides the legal principles to help states to achieve this. Dr White, in this authoritative book, has explored how these principles have been interpreted and developed by the Security Council and the General Assembly during the Cold and the Post-Cold War. He also discusses what he describes as one of the most significant achievements of the United Nations: the creation, development and expansion of peace-keeping activities.

The three elements of the book, the Security Council, the General Assembly and peacekeeping, are examined through a common framework: the political, historical and diplomatic context, the question of legal competence and the legal powers, practice and effectiveness of the United Nations.

In examining the practice of the Security Council, Dr White analyses the efficacy of the methods the Council has used to help parties to settle their disputes peacefully and to respond to potential and actual violent inter- and intra-state disputes and suggests improvements. He also discusses the possibility of the judicial review of the post-cold war Council's use or abuse of its constitutional powers; and the creation of international criminal tribunals and the possibility of the judicial review of the post-cold war Council's use or abuse of its constitutional powers.

Dr White then considers the tension between the Security Council and the General Assembly about which organ has primacy, the areas in which the General Assembly has assumed primacy — disarmament and the general principles of international peace — and then assesses the Assembly's contribution to maintaining international peace and security.

Finally, Dr White looks at the circumstances in which, and by whom, peacekeeping activities have been created. He examines the governing legal principles and then provides a typology of practice: observation; supervision; disarmament; human rights monitoring; election monitoring, assistance and organisation; and humanitarian assistance.

This is an excellent book, which will be extremely useful for students of law and of international relations and security. I have only two very minor criticisms. First, Dr White asserts that the United States did not permit any United Nations peacekeeping activities in the Americas until 1969, when the observer group in Central America was deployed. He appears to have overlooked the presence of the representative of the Secretary-General in the Dominican Republic from May 1965 to October 1966. The representative was assisted by the military adviser to the Secretary-General and three military observers. U. Thant described this as a new

United Nations mission in the peacekeeping capacity. It was the first time that the United Nations had operated in the same area and dealt with the same matters as an operation of a regional organisation.

Secondly, Dr White claims that the Secretary-General could use more readily Article 99 of the Charter to draw to the attention of the Council any matter which in his opinion might threaten international peace and security. I think that this underestimates the political factors that inhibit the incumbent from doing this and also underestimates the range of alternative methods he could use to alert the Council to a threatening situation without the publicity and drama of an emergency meeting of the Security Council.

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