

FINNISH FOREIGN POLICY PAPERS

02

Unto Vesa

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FINLAND IN THE UNITED NATIONS

Consistent and Credible Constructivism

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ULKOPOLIITTINEN INSTITUUTTI
UTRIKESPOLITISKA INSTITUTET
THE FINNISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

FINLAND IN THE UNITED NATIONS

Consistent and Credible Constructivism

by Unto Vesa

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Photo: Paulo Filgueiras / UN Photo



I

**ENTRÉ: COMMITMENT PROMISED,
CONTINUITY CLAIMED**

Finland was ready, willing, able and legally qualified to join the United Nations right after the Peace Treaty in 1947, but was refused entry for several years due to the Cold War deadlock in the Security Council. Thus Finland did not attain membership until mid-December 1955. The government reiterated in this context its earlier commitments to the UN Charter obligations, and Prime Minister Urho Kekkonen stated that although the UN could not be expected to achieve instant comprehensive solutions, it nevertheless represents valuable and important goals and is therefore of special importance to small states and nations.¹ The organization had already been on the world stage for a decade, so its weaknesses during the Cold War had already become obvious, as Kekkonen's assessment implies. Yet, he also expressed the belief that the ultimately achieved membership of the organization would strengthen Finland's international position and prestige.

President J. K. Paasikivi offered his reflections on the membership – as the third foreign policy achievement of the year – a fortnight later in his New Year's speech by referring to historical continuity: “We have always supported the idea of an international peace organization”. Paasikivi mentioned two Finnish statesmen of the nineteenth century who were engaged in such efforts, wishing that “in such a way small nations would achieve security and international law would get strength”. “It is our most pious wish”, stated Paasikivi, “that the United Nations would succeed, better than its predecessor, in its vital and most important task, the maintenance of peace and security and the maintenance of justice between nations”.²

So the opening phase was characterized by pious wishes and realistic assessments, but the first real test cases for Finland, and for the organization, came in the following autumn: the Hungarian and the Suez crises. In the context of those two crises Finland outlined two basic features of its foreign policy in the United Nations: caution and bold constructivism.

The popular uprising in Hungary and the Soviet intervention to suppress it swiftly turned into an East-West confrontation. The use of veto had blocked the settlement of the issue in the Security Council, so it was placed on the General Assembly agenda, first at the request of the Nagy government, but after it had been toppled, the crisis remained on the agenda in spite of opposition by the Soviet Union and its East European allies. The General Assembly adopted a total of eleven resolutions on the conflict in the Emergency Session and in the 11th GA Session, and there were several separate votes on individual paragraphs in the resolutions.

Finland, like all members, had to define its position on all those votes, and consequently voted in favour of five resolutions and abstained in five. The basic solution was to abstain in cases where the resolution or a paragraph contained strong condemnations because these were not seen as appropriate for a neutral country to vote in favour of. On the other hand, Finland voted in favour of the resolutions dealing with humanitarian support and aid for refugees, and also voted in favour of paragraphs which stated that the events expressed the desire of the Hungarian people to enjoy freedom and independence; that the withdrawal of Soviet troops was indispensable; and that there should be free elections in Hungary as soon as possible so that the Hungarian people could decide for themselves about their government.³ In its own statement, the Finnish delegation expressed “the fervent hope that Hungary and the Soviet Union will be able to agree on the withdrawal of the Soviet troops in Hungary and on the safeguarding of the fundamental human rights of the Hungarian people in a way that would correspond to their many centuries-old traditions of freedom”.⁴

These positions aptly illustrate the balancing acts Finland's delegation had to perform. There was strong domestic support and sym-

1 Quoted in Klaus Törnudd, *Suomi ja Yhdistyneet Kansakunnat*, Helsinki: Tammi 1967, p. 33.

2 J.K. Paasikivi, *Paasikiven linja. Puheita vuosilta 1944–1956*, Porvoo: WSOY 1966, p. 238.

3 See Törnudd, *op.cit.*, pp. 66–69 and Unto Vesa, *Determining Finland's position in international crises*, Yearbook of Finnish Foreign Policy 1979, Helsinki: Finnish Institute of International Affairs 1980, p. 6.

4 *Yhdistyneiden Kansakuntien 11. yleiskokous*. Helsinki: Ulkoasiainministeriö 1957, p. 71.

pathy in Finland for the Hungarian people, and the government naturally wanted to express its support for the withdrawal of Soviet troops and for Hungarian independence as well as humanitarian support, but also wanted to avoid measures that would damage its good relations with the Soviet Union. "Finland, sticking to its neutral foreign policy and strong commitment to peace, wants carefully to avoid any such measures that according to its view may cause or maintain international tensions", declared the government to the Parliament. Thus, the policy of neutrality expressed its dualism: caution in the form of abstentions, and constructive support when considered feasible.

In the Suez Crisis of 1956 a similar basic pattern emerged, but now with the more concrete constructive approach which was to characterize Finland's UN policies for decades. Again, the Security Council was not able to act due to the use of veto, but this time the United States and the Soviet Union were "on the same side" in agreeing that France, Great Britain and Israel had to halt their military operation. When the General Assembly dealt with the crisis, Finland, together with other Nordic countries, abstained in some controversial votes, but was in favour of concrete measures to resolve the crisis. These concerned the fresh idea of peacekeeping.

Once Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld had introduced the idea of peacekeeping troops and had sent an inquiry to several small and medium countries about their readiness to provide troops, the Finnish government sent a positive response the following day – in fact, Finland was the first country to respond! It was a quick and bold response because peacekeeping was an unknown field, not even mentioned in the Charter, and of course, there was no domestic legislation on peacekeeping either. Finland was subsequently one of ten countries providing troops to the UNEF I operation, together with three other Nordic countries.

The original principles of UN peacekeeping suited Finland's foreign policy well from the very beginning: through them it was possible to express concrete support for the UN, for the Secretary-General, for the promotion of peaceful means in conflict resolution, for international law and for multilateralism in

general. Moreover, participation in peacekeeping was considered to strengthen Finland's neutrality and its status in the Nordic group. No wonder then that Finland's participation in peacekeeping – and later under the title crisis management – has continued to this day. Finland has sent personnel to several UN peace operations in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, and the total number of Finnish personnel that have served in these missions is close to 50,000.⁵

One can argue that of the two elements manifested in the crucial decisions in 1956, caution and bold constructivism, the first prevailed in clear Cold War issues until the end of the Cold War, whereas the other, the constructive approach through pragmatic and concrete measures, has continued ever since and characterizes Finland's foreign policy in the UN even today.

5 For a more detailed analysis of Finland's peacekeeping policy, see Unto Vesa, *Continuity and Change in the Finnish Debate on Peacekeeping*, *International Peacekeeping*, Vol. 14, Number 4, August 2007, pp. 524–537.

Photo: UN Photo



II

NEUTRALITY: LIMITS AND MERITS

Throughout the Cold War, Finland wanted to gain recognition for its neutrality – although it was not particularly easy in the early years – and the United Nations was very important for Finland in this effort. First, it provided a forum for pursuing this recognition, and made it clear to all that Finland belonged to the Nordic group and to the Western regional group. But at the same time, the policy of neutrality had to prove its credibility and usefulness in a world where some regarded neutrality as weak or immoral. Therefore neutrality was to serve as an instrument not only for Finland’s own interests but for the wider international community if possible.

This dual endeavour is well illustrated by the guidelines issued by the President to Finland’s delegation to the 1956 General Assembly session: the delegation had to pursue Finland’s effort to stay outside of great power conflicts. Accordingly, it had to try to promote solutions which seemed to be able to command the support of all the great powers; it had to avoid any measures that might have caused, maintained or accentuated conflicts; and it was to abstain from making any statements, if the said effort could not be realized.⁶

Because this was the defined basis of Finland’s foreign policy – and therefore also in the UN – a strict line of neutrality was applied by Finland’s delegation in any conflict situation which according to Finland’s own perception was somehow related to great power conflicts. But of course it was possible to extend the demands and merits of neutrality – such as a balanced approach and the avoidance of taking sides – beyond great power confrontations to other conflicts as well. Thus, Finland’s UN Ambassador, Mr Max Jakobson, outlined Finland’s view of neutrality in the emergency special session on the Middle East conflict in 1967:

“We believe that Finland can best contribute to such efforts (the preservation and strengthening of peace) through strict and consistent adherence to our policy of neutrality which, while it enjoins us to refrain

from taking sides in the disputes between the great powers, enables us to maintain good relations with all states across the dividing lines of ideology of military alignments, and thus to work wherever possible for the cause of conciliation, peaceful settlement of disputes, and international cooperation. In times of tension and conflict, such as these, when the very fabric of international relations is damaged and many governments find themselves unable even to communicate with each other, neutral states have, we believe, a special obligation, not only to themselves but to the international community as a whole, to conduct themselves with objectivity and restraint, so as to retain the confidence of all parties and thus their ability to perform such peaceful services as may be required, including the modest yet indispensable service of maintaining contact between states that have broken diplomatic relations. This is an obligation which the Finnish Government is accustomed to assume.”⁷

Ambassador Jakobson’s eloquent and powerful description of the obligations and merits of neutrality thus includes the notions of objectivity and restraint, and the claim that, when strictly applied in conflict situations, neutrality establishes a credible basis for conflict resolution, conciliation and peaceful settlement. Therefore it is evident that although Finland, since joining the European Union in 1995, no longer characterizes its foreign policy as neutrality in the legal sense, those positive features of the foreign policy tradition are still connected to its image in the United Nations.

6 See Max Jakobson, *Veteen piirretty viiva. Havaintoja ja merkintöjä vuosilta 1953–1965*. Keuruu: Otava 1980, p. 97.

7 *Ulkopoliittisia lausuntoja ja asiakirjoja (ULA)*, Helsinki: Ulkoasiainministeriö 1968, p. 270.

Photo: UN Photo



III

“PHYSICIAN RATHER THAN JUDGE”

When President Urho Kekkonen addressed the General Assembly for the first time in 1961, he expressed Finland's line in a metaphor that has thereafter often been used to describe Finland's approach: "We see ourselves as physicians rather than judges; it is not for us to pass judgement nor to condemn. It is rather to diagnose and to try to cure".⁸ This metaphor is, of course, another way of expressing the basic line, as described above, namely one of restraint in Cold War issues (where verbal condemnations also prevailed in the UN), and a constructive approach to conciliation and peace promotion when considered feasible.

Restraint and caution did not deter Finland from outlining its principled position on various issues, however. On the contrary, Finland has stated its position even with regard to the most difficult issues, including those which one or more great powers were party to. In such issues Finland has always referred to the UN Charter and the principles of international law as the basic yardstick. The continuous emphasis on negotiations and on the peaceful settlement of all conflicts and the prohibition of the use of force follow logically from those principles.

To illustrate the way in which Finland applied this approach with regard to various conflicts, let us mention a few examples. In the case of the 1968 Czechoslovakian crisis, Finland stated immediately that all disputes between states should be resolved peacefully and by negotiation, and later in the autumn that the developments could not but "weaken confidence in such a development of international life as would preclude the use of force in the relations among States".⁹

When it came to the Cuban missile crisis, Finland expressed its support to the UN Secretary-General and called for a negotiated solution. Moreover, with regard to the US blockade of Cuba, Finland stated that according to the principles of international law "no restrictions can be placed on freedom

of navigation in international waters during peacetime".¹⁰

As for the war in Indochina, Finland's delegation reiterated its "strong opposition to the use of military means of violence in Vietnam or anywhere else and expressing our conviction that all conflicts between nations must be solved by peaceful means".¹¹ In this context the Geneva Agreements were mentioned as the basis for a solution, and in 1970 when the war spread to Cambodia, Finland stated that the use of force and threat of force conflicted with the Charter, and expressed its serious concern that the territory of a neutral country had been invaded in a conflict to which it was not a party.¹²

When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan at the end of 1979, Finland abstained in the General Assembly vote, but Ambassador Ilkka Pastinen stated Finland's view very explicitly: the principles of territorial integrity, inviolability of state frontiers and national self-determination must be respected by all; it was important that "normal conditions are restored in Afghanistan as soon as possible and that the foreign troops are withdrawn"; the Government expressed its deep anxiety about tendencies which seemed to jeopardize the peaceful conduct of relations; it was up to the United Nations and the permanent members of the Security Council in particular to maintain international peace and security and to guide "the evolution towards a more peaceful world order".¹³

As the statements cited above illustrate, Finland has consistently emphasized the central principles of international law in the context of every crisis. A negative attitude towards the use of force and the threat of force has been regularly expressed and the necessity for peaceful solutions stressed. Depending on the character of the conflicts concerned, other legal principles have been referred to, such as the territorial integrity

8 Yhdistyneiden Kansakuntien yleiskokouksen kolmas erityisistunto sekä kuudestoista istuntokausi ja sen jatkoistunto. Helsinki: Ulkoasiainministeriön julkaisuja 1962, pp. 165-166.

9 ULA 1968, pp. 207, 246-247.

10 ULA 1962, pp. 32-33.

11 ULA 1966, pp. 131-132. For a more detailed analysis of Finland's Indochina policy, see Osmo Apunen - Unto Vesa, Suomen suhtautuminen Kaakkois-Aasian sotaan. Tampereen yliopisto. *Politiikan tutkimuksen laitos. Tutkimuksia*. No. 70, 1982.

12 ULA 1970, pp. 144, 311.

13 Quoted in Vesa 1980, op. cit., pp. 15-16.

of states, the inviolability of frontiers, the right of national self-determination, respect for human rights and freedom of navigation. Another common feature in Finland's positions is the strong support for the UN Charter, the Secretary-General and the Security Council, and of course this facet of the policy is firmly linked to international law as well.

The strong emphasis on legal principles rather than moral judgments in the Finnish approach is conceptualized to open the way to peace promotion. Particularly during the Cold War and in various bitter conflicts, like those in the Middle East, passing moral judgements and taking the side of one conflict party or another has been considered to undermine the opportunities for constructive action, to risk the desired role of the physician, to use Kekkonen's metaphor.

Photo: Yutaka Nagata / UN Photo



IV

SMALL STATE PERSPECTIVE

Strong emphasis on international law, international organization and multilateral cooperation is said to be typical of small states, but for Finland the small state perspective has been a continuous theme ever since the beginning of the country's UN membership. Small states have to put their efforts into law and cooperation, while great powers can rely on their might. As quoted earlier, President Paasikivi had already expressed the view that through international organization "small nations would achieve security and international law would get strength". The role of small states was a constant concern for President Kekkonen, who thought that "small states have little power to influence the course of international events. The Great Powers possessing the means of destroying the world bear the chief responsibility for the maintenance of peace", but "the smaller states can and must constantly remind them of this responsibility".¹⁴

Regarding disarmament issues, it has often been stated that Finland's interest is quite obvious, because "as a small neutral country which stands non-aligned in its relations to military alliances, Finland is basically in the same position as the vast majority of the Member States of the United Nations: reduction of international tension and disarmament is in the security interest of such countries".¹⁵

This notion of being in the same position as the vast majority of UN member states is of great importance. It serves as an important indicator for Finland that its traditionally closest reference group, the Nordic countries, is not the only one, and that Finland can also identify with the security concerns of other small nations. The small state perspective also underlines the need for cooperation in all global issues, be they security, economic and social development, environment or human rights.

14 See *Finnish Disarmament Policy*. Helsinki: Ministry for Foreign Affairs 1983, pp. 105–106.

15 Quoted in Unto Vesa, *Small State Contribution to Disarmament: The Case of Finland*, in *Challenges and Responses in European Security*. TAPRI Yearbook 1986 (Ed. by Vilho Harle), Aldershot: Avebury 1987, p. 243.

Since 1995, when Finland joined the European Union, the reference to the policy of neutrality has disappeared from the official vocabulary, but not its merits, such as a balanced approach and objectivity, nor the small state perspective on global issues. Suffice it to refer to the address by President Sauli Niinistö in the General Assembly this autumn:

"The UN is a genuinely universal forum for cooperation. It has unique legitimacy. For us, it is an indispensable means to promote international peace and security, development and human rights. As a small country – and there are only some five million of us Finns – a world order based on respect for the UN Charter and international law is a must. It is not an option."¹⁶

One can of course argue that the emphasis on the small state perspective on global issues and on the value of multilateralism is making a virtue out of necessity, but that does not make it any less valid.

16 <http://www.tpk.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=258498&nodeid=44810&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>

Photo: Milton Grant / UN Photo



V

PRIORITIES IN FOCUS

Covering Finland's full range of activities in the United Nations to any meaningful extent is beyond the scope of this paper, simply because the country has been so very active in every field of the organization: peace and security, economic and social development, human rights, international law, and so forth. On the other hand, it is evident that in every field Finland has set some priorities in accordance with its own values and capabilities and thus focused its attention and resources on some specific issues or forms of action. Thus, when it comes to peace and security issues, for instance, Finland has contributed to peacekeeping and disarmament, paying special attention, in terms of the latter, to nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation, chemical weapons, and the arms trade.

Regarding economic and social development, Finland has worked intensively for the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and consistently stressed the role of women and the role of education in development. In the field of human rights, again a strong emphasis on equal rights for women – which is natural for a country that has had a pioneering role in the struggle for gender equality for over a century. Yet, although one can point to certain priorities, it is equally important to note that Finland has consistently stressed that in a globalized and interdependent world all of these “fields” are closely linked to each other: peace and security, economic and social development, democracy and human rights, the rule of law and international law not only depend on each other, but support each other.

To illustrate Finland's priorities for action, let's briefly describe some of Finland's activities and views on peacekeeping, disarmament, development and human rights.

As mentioned earlier, Finland was the first country in 1956 to respond positively to the idea of providing peacekeepers for UNEF I. Throughout the Cold War period Finland was among the leading contributors to UN peacekeeping, and also played a major role in UN General Assembly negotiations on peacekeeping, such as those dealing with its financial aspects. Finland's role was also crucial in introducing the new multidimensional peacekeeping concept in the context

of the UNTAG operation in Namibia in 1989–90, to which Finland provided major components on both the military and civilian side. Since the Cold War, the UN approach has also changed: instead of mere peacekeeping, the notions of peace support operations, crisis management and even peace enforcement have gained ground, and Finland – together with other traditional peacekeepers – has adapted itself to the new challenges and participated in several peace operations, both UN and those authorized by the UN.¹⁷

While Finland has not participated in all UN operations, it has, ever since the early days, paid special attention to some key UN peacekeeping problems, particularly in terms of trying to explore ways of establishing a stable financial basis for peacekeeping and of developing capabilities readily available for operations; for too long all operations suffered from a lack of solid funding and from the ad hoc way in which operations were launched.

Finland's second membership term in the Security Council in 1989–90 provided a platform for promoting its views on the principles of peacekeeping and strengthening UN capabilities. Negotiations with the other Council members resulted in a unanimously approved ‘Note of the President’ on peacekeeping, the first of its kind. The note stressed the importance of adequate resources for operations and their secure financial basis, and underlined that “the operations must be planned and conducted with maximum efficiency and cost-effectiveness”. It also stated that peacekeeping was always intended to be a temporary measure, designed to facilitate the resolution of conflict and disputes, and “should never be construed as a substitute for the ultimate goal, an early negotiated settlement”.¹⁸

The last point referred to above, protracted conflicts without any settlement in sight, has often been exploited by critics, but Finland has not shared that criticism. As long ago as 1987, the Nordic countries concluded in their statement that:

¹⁷ See Vesa 2007, *op.cit.*

¹⁸ Note by the President of the Security Council, UN doc. S/21323, 30 May 1990.

“There are those people who criticize UN peacekeeping operations because of their alleged lack of result. The Nordic countries do not concur in this criticism. Those critics seem to forget that peacekeeping *per se* is nothing but an instrument to support peace-making; an instrument to establish and maintain a cease-fire and tranquillity in an area of conflict and, thus, to create favourable conditions for negotiations. In short: peace-keeping is an instrument to give time to peace-making efforts... But peace-keeping cannot replace peace-making. When the political will of the parties in the conflict is lacking, the peacekeeping operation may drag on for a long time without corresponding progress toward a solution of the conflict.”¹⁹

The following year, the Nordic governments expressed the hope that the improved international climate and the strengthened UN role, together with the political will of the parties concerned, would ensure progress in the solution of regional conflicts. But as we now know, in most cases UN peace operations do drag on because no political solutions have been found, and this concerns, of course, most tragically the multitude of conflicts in the Middle Eastern region. Yet, peacekeepers and peace operations have mostly produced what can reasonably be expected from them: a freeze on situations, the prevention of further violence and the creation of space for negotiations.

Foreign Minister Erkki Tuomioja summarized the evolution of peacekeeping in his UN address as follows:

“The concept of peacekeeping has evolved considerably during the existence of the UN from purely military operations into versatile, complex and continuous efforts that extend in some cases to nation building. A growing element in them is civilian crisis management. This should be further strengthened... Present complex crises are often too demanding for any one organization to deal with. All regional organisations should work closely together and with the

¹⁹ *Yhdistyneiden Kansakuntien yleiskokous 1987*, Helsinki: Ulkoasiainministeriön julkaisuja 1988; quoted in Vesa 2007.

United Nations in trying to solve crises all over the world.”²⁰

He has also aptly expressed the importance of historical and small state perspectives as background factors for Finland’s approach: “Small countries, and Finland and Sweden with their background of neutrality, have perhaps a greater understanding of working between various partners in situations where solutions cannot be imposed but have to be brought about by working together”.

Finally, one asset in Finland’s peacekeeping toolkit is the fact that “except for officers, all Finnish peacekeepers are reservists. Thus, everyone brings his or her civilian experiences and professional skills. We try to make use of these civilian skills to the fullest extent”, Tuomioja has asserted, and “Finns attempt to build confidence between different groups, solve conflicts peacefully and point out to groupings that view each other with suspicion that co-operation brings more benefits and security to everyone than hostilities”.²¹

Regarding disarmament issues, Minister Ralph Enckell expressed Finland’s line in 1957 – namely at a time when disarmament was on the UN agenda but no conventions or agreements had yet been reached – in this way: “We are prepared to support any equitable solution which, at the same time, is feasible. But can we regard as feasible proposals which do not seem to be able to command the support of all the Great Powers, on which, in the last analysis, progress in the field of disarmament depends?”²²

Although phrased as a question, the formula actually summarizes the Finnish view according to which the great powers are mainly responsible for the progress, or lack thereof, in disarmament negotiations. President Kekkonen evaluated the feasibility of disarmament proposals with the same yardstick when he addressed the General Assembly in 1961: “It is our earnest hope that powers principally concerned will deal with

²⁰ www.un.int/finland/speech%20Tuomioja%20GAgeneral%20debate14092002.html

²¹ Erkki Tuomioja, *Demokratia lyömässä läpi Afrikassa*, interview in *Uutispäivä Demari*, 5 Nov. 2003, quoted in Vesa 2007, p. 534.

²² Finnish Disarmament Policy, op. cit. p. 69.

the problem of disarmament with all the will to succeed they can muster".²³

It is fully consistent with this reasoning that later on, after 1963 when the great powers – the USA, the UK and the USSR in the first stage – were able to agree about partial arms control measures, Finland has supported all such treaties, conventions and negotiations aimed at new disarmament agreements. Of course, Finland, like all small countries, has often expressed its hope for more far-reaching agreements, but on the other hand underlined the connection between détente and disarmament and thereby the view that even minor advances were steps in the right direction.

Nuclear disarmament has clearly been one of Finland's main focal points in the UN. At the beginning of the 1960s, when the nuclear tests by France and the Soviet Union were the subject of General Assembly votes, Finland voted in favour of the resolutions, asking the powers concerned to give up testing, but at the same time deplored the procedure whereby individual countries were singled out in the resolutions; Finland was against all atomic tests regardless of where and by which country they were conducted.²⁴

Finland's support for the Comprehensive Test Ban has, of course, always been self-evident because a complete ban on all tests has been conceived as a major step towards nuclear disarmament. Finland also wanted very early on to contribute in a concrete way to the achievement of the CTB by providing its experts and the capabilities of its seismic detection system, so that verification claims could not be used as an excuse for not joining the ban.²⁵

However, the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons has undoubtedly been Finland's main priority in disarmament. The prospects of proliferation in the 1960s were truly frightening, both globally and in various regions, and therefore the agreement by the US, British and Soviet governments on the Non-Proliferation Treaty was unreservedly welcomed by Finland as well as by most countries in the world. Finland played a role

in the UN in exploring and seeking a common understanding between the three powers and the majority of non-aligned nations about the balanced commitments in the NPT.

The basic deal in the Treaty was, and is, that the non-nuclear weapon states commit themselves not to acquire nuclear weapons and the nuclear states commit themselves to nuclear disarmament. There has always been some tension between the nuclear and non-nuclear weapon states because during the decades that have passed since 1970, when the Treaty entered into force, the nuclear powers have not fulfilled their commitment to nuclear disarmament: SALT and START limitations are not sufficient in this regard. However, Finland has not shared the criticism of some states about the discriminatory character of the Treaty, nor has Finland shared the view that the security of non-nuclear weapon states would have been diminished by their decision to give up the nuclear option. According to the Finnish view, the NPT has been in the security interests of all states.

Therefore Finland has played a very active diplomatic role in the General Assembly, in the NPT Review Conferences and in the IAEA to strengthen the Treaty and the non-proliferation regime as a whole.²⁶

The NPT also had a major positive regional impact in Europe from the very beginning. It paved the way to CSCE and SALT negotiations. The NPT also recognizes the value of nuclear-weapon-free zones as supportive measures. Finland, as a country that put forward the idea of a Nordic NWFZ, has also explored the potential of regional measures in the UN context, and lent its support to nuclear-weapon-free zones around the world as a means of preventing the spread of nuclear weapons. This support started with the Tlatelolco Treaty, and at present Finland is providing its good offices in efforts to promote and implement a zone free of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. The zone in the Middle East is undoubtedly a most urgent and vital regional measure to maintain and strengthen the non-proliferation regime globally.

23 Ibid., p. 71.

24 Törnudd op. cit., pp. 60–61.

25 Finnish Disarmament Policy, op. cit., pp. 97–101.

26 Ibid. pp. 82–97.

Although nuclear disarmament has received the most attention in Finland's – as well as other countries' – disarmament policy, other major issues have also been on the agenda. Finland had a major role in promoting the prohibition of chemical weapons because it developed and produced a verification capability that can be used in three different activities: verification of the destruction of stocks, of non-production of chemical weapons and of alleged use. The rationale for this project was the same as for the seismic network capability, namely removing the control issue as an obstacle to the Treaty.²⁷

While the activities described above do not cover the whole range of Finland's activism in the UN and CD in disarmament, (the promotion of confidence-building measures, the action to advance arms trade regulation, and so forth should also be mentioned), they illustrate the basic and permanent tenets in Finland's approach: a strong will to promote all disarmament measures, considered to be "equitable" and "feasible", through diplomacy, good offices and concrete measures. Underlying this approach is the understanding that disarmament is in the best national interests of all small states.

Regarding economic and social development, Finland pledged its support to UN development goals as early as the 1960s, and also wanted to associate closely with the other Nordic countries in this field. At that time, the other Nordic countries were, and still are, much further ahead in implementing the UN goals than Finland. In fact, after the war, Finland was for a long time a net recipient of development assistance as it received aid from UNICEF and favourable loans from the World Bank. Against this historical background, Finland's readiness to commit itself and to achieve the UN development goals is understandable, although it is still lagging behind.

One notable feature in Finland's development cooperation has been the significant share of multilateral aid. In channelling a large part of its aid through UN organizations, like the UNDP, UNICEF and the Population Fund UNFPA, Finland has sought to express

27 Ibid., pp. 130–137.

its support for both the UN system as a whole and for the role of developing countries in the respective decision-making.

When President Kekkonen addressed the UN General Assembly in 1970, he voiced his concerns about development in the strongest terms. He stated that according to his belief, the problems of development must be tackled with the same urgency as those of war and peace, because "the suffering and misery, and the decay and destruction of human values caused by the lack of development may in the long run prove to be as vast and as terrible as any imaginable future war", and "the question is whether there is the will to use the resources available to meet the urgent needs of development".²⁸

In fact, the relationship between the issues of war and peace and development, referred to by Kekkonen, is already in the UN Charter, but in recent years that notion has received increasing attention. In the Millennium Declaration and other milestone documents it has been asserted – unanimously and convincingly – that in the increasingly interdependent world, peace and security, economic and social development, environmental protection, democracy and human rights really are interconnected and depend on each other. Respectively, the lack of progress in any of them hampers progress in others.

President Tarja Halonen, who served as the co-chair of the UN Millennium Summit, stated her view in as explicit terms as President Kekkonen three decades earlier:

"As much as we must protect people from fear we must protect them from want. We need to make them feel secure and respected. Human-centred sustainable development is the best means of long-term crisis prevention. It addresses the structural causes of conflict and thus builds a solid foundation for lasting peace. Elimination of poverty, respect for human rights and gender equality are crucial elements in this respect. I am convinced that there is no peace without sustainable development and no development without lasting peace. They go hand in hand in all parts of the world."

28 See *ULA 1970*.

Therefore Finland, like most countries, emphasizes the view that sustainable development – a concept to which Finland has lent its support since it was launched – calls for proper attention to be paid to all three elements: economic, social and environmental sustainability. Finland has, of course, given its full support to the UN Millennium Development Goals, and also in this connection committed itself to increasing its development assistance to the 0.7 per cent ODA/GDP level – in keeping with the European Union as a whole.

President Tarja Halonen has played a prominent role in advancing the Millennium Development Goals. In addition to having co-chaired the Summit, she subsequently co-chaired the ILO World Commission on the Social Dimension of Globalization and most recently the UN High Level Panel on Global Sustainability.²⁹ In all these connections she has emphasized that the UN must make a serious effort to ensure that all countries and all people can enjoy the fruits of globalization.

Decent globalization is the catchword of the ILO report for a more equitable world order. It has to be remembered that in the 1970s Finland was in the group of ‘like-minded’ countries, expressing its support for what was then labelled as the New International Economic Order, the crux of which was to enhance the position of developing countries in the world economic and political system. Nowadays the NIEO label is no longer in use, but of course the effort to advance the legitimate goals of developing countries remains and has Finland’s support.

Yet another statement by President Halonen outlines an essential element in the Finnish approach to the problems of development, where a strong linkage to human rights is visible as well.

“The UN has done and needs to continue to do good work for those most in need; women, children, minorities and the disabled. The UN global conferences addressed many human needs and individuals’ everyday concerns and we will continue in conferences on racism, HIV/AIDS, and the situation

29 See <http://www.presidentti.fi/halonen/Public/default655c-2.html?contentid=173489&nodeid=41417&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>

of children. I emphasise that ‘We the peoples’ is the central element of the UN Charter.”³⁰

If we wish to point out some specific features of Finland’s profile in development issues, two or three emerge from the overall picture: firstly, a strong holistic approach underlining the mutual linkages between various aspects of development, secondly, a strong emphasis on the importance of education, and thirdly, a strong focus on the role of women and gender equality. Each of these features is reinforced by Finland’s own development history, where the importance of universal education was understood as early as the 19th century and where women’s political and economic rights were pioneered. According to the Finnish view, the denial of women’s rights not only violates their human rights, but also ignores the huge human resource potential of women for social development.

Much could be said about Finland’s activities for human rights in the UN system. It is self-evident that for Finland the concept of human rights covers all dimensions: political, economic, social and cultural, and Finland has consistently stressed the universal nature of human rights. Finland is party to all important human rights conventions and has worked for decades for their promotion and implementation. The rights of women, children, minorities and the disabled have played a special role in Finland’s activities, as described by President Halonen above.

An interesting new feature in Finnish statements in the UN is that, while earlier it was commonplace to describe one’s own virtues and merits regarding human rights issues – and rightly so – recently it has been recognized and admitted that every country can do better. Thus, for instance, in the past the debate on racism focused on South Africa, which was understandable at the time when apartheid was the officially sanctioned policy of the white regime. Nowadays, the importance of the struggle against racism everywhere, including one’s own society, is recognized: “The Finnish government is very concerned about the persistence of racism

30 <http://www.presidentti.fi/halonen/Public/default655c-2.html?contentid=173489&nodeid=41417&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>

and ethnic intolerance in various parts of the world. This is also true with regard to Europe, Finland being no exception".³¹ It is possible that this kind of approach, where the records of all countries are subject to critical evaluation by the countries concerned as well as by outsiders, may advance an open and constructive human rights dialogue rather than the practice of just blaming others.

Finally, a specific issue in Finland's consistent human rights policy worth noting is its long-term action for the abolishment of the death penalty worldwide. Finland first voiced its views against the death penalty in the UN as early as 1957.³² Further, as President Halonen has pointed out, Finland's position is based on its own historical experience: "We have not carried out executions in peacetime since the year 1826 and the last provisions regarding the use of the death penalty under martial law were removed in 1972".

Furthermore, Finland explains its policy with objective legal arguments: The death penalty is an inhuman form of punishment, and there may be the possibility of malpractice in trials. It can also discriminate against certain groups in society, and it always carries with it the risk of innocent people being executed, after which no remedy exists. Moreover, capital punishment does not act as a deterrent. Finland's analysis is followed by concrete proposals, for instance that as a first step, governments should refrain from carrying out executions.³³ This chain of reasoning is typical of Finland's line in the UN: it is action against a phenomenon considered negative, not against the countries where capital punishment is still in use.

The last point also underscores the notion about Finland's negative stance towards all forms of force, war and violence from the individual level to the international system. Finland has stated its negative stance in the UN towards war, terrorism, hijackings, kid-

nappings, military coups, torture and the death penalty. Only the use of force for national defence and by the UN, in accordance with the UN Charter, is excluded from this comprehensive negative stand.³⁴

31 <http://www.un.int/finland/speechg.html>

32 See Statement by Tyyne Leivo-Larsson at the 12th General Assembly of the United Nations 17.9.-14.12.1957. Ulkoasiainministeriön julkaisu, Helsinki 1958, pp. 122-123.

33 *Finnish Priorities in the United Nations - Human Rights*. The Permanent Mission of Finland to the United Nations. <http://www.un.int/finland/hrights.html>

34 See Vesa 1980, op.cit., p. 19, and Unto Vesa, Finland in the UN as an EU state, in *Northern Dimensions. Yearbook 2001*. Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs, pp. 59-71.

Photo: Teddy Chen / UN Photo



VI

FINLAND IN THE SECURITY COUNCIL

Finland has served the international community twice in the Security Council: in 1969–70 and 1989–90. Ambassador Max Jakobson has described eloquently and in detail the key events during the first term. That term was launched by his strong declaration about Finland's policy of neutrality and about how it enables Finland to act for conciliation and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and in this way creates the basis for good offices in favour of international peace and security.

Finland thus pledged its constructive input where SC activities were concerned, and in the following two years did, in fact, play an active role in several important issues. Most items on the Council's agenda at that time dealt with African problems – Namibia, Southern Rhodesia, Portuguese colonies and the apartheid policies of South Africa – as well as the Middle East. Finland took a strong initiative with regard to Namibia, and the Council adopted a unanimous resolution in January 1970, which exerted pressure on South Africa, and in the summer introduced another resolution in which the Security Council requested the International Court of Justice to issue a ruling on Namibia's legal status.

The Court found in its ruling – as Finland had expected – that South Africa's hold over Namibia was unlawful. This ruling, because it recognized Namibia's right to independence and ordered the South African government to change its policy, paved the way for a process – albeit a very long one – which finally led to Namibia's independence, and in which Martti Ahtisaari went on to play a vital role. Finland also played a role in the Southern Rhodesian issue, which strengthened the sanctions in a way that was acceptable to all Council members.

As regards the various aspects of the conflicts in the Middle East, Finland's action did not yield equally positive results. The abstention by Finland's delegation in the vote concerning the arson attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque – because Finland had proposed an inquiry into the matter and this route was not followed – was somewhat controversial, but according to Jakobson it showed that Finland had taken its own stand on a factual basis without committing its position to

either side beforehand. During its SC term Finland also took the initiative to re-launch negotiations on peace in the Middle East, but this initiative failed, due to opposition from both Egypt and Israel.³⁵

Two Finnish achievements during its 1969–70 membership of the Council deserve special attention because of their pioneering character regarding the working methods of the Council. The first case concerned Northern Ireland in August 1970. The foreign minister of Ireland wanted to address the Council in order to propose that the UN would send peacekeeping troops to Northern Ireland.

According to Jakobson, the UK representative had been shocked at first by the mere idea of allowing the Irish foreign minister to address the Council on that matter, but at Jakobson's behest the proposal was approved and the foreign minister had the opportunity to make his statement. In this way neither side – Ireland nor the UK – lost face, which was a victory for the UN in diplomatic terms and also demonstrated a flexible way for the Council to listen to all relevant parties in future conflicts.

The second major Finnish initiative during that term was the idea of launching periodic Security Council meetings at the ministerial level. There was a basis for this initiative in Article 28 of the Charter, but it had long been ignored. All previous Secretaries General had attempted to persuade the great powers to hold such meetings, but failed in their attempts. Finland's government perceived that the time was ripe for another attempt, and started negotiations with the other Council members and great powers to convene the first such meeting, with the purpose of institutionalizing the practice.

The idea behind making such meetings routine – for instance, twice a year – was that foreign ministers would regularly have the opportunity to discuss various issues without the great expectations and great risks of failure associated with all summits during the Cold War. After four months of discussions and negotiations, Finland's initiative was approved, and in October 1970 the first

35 Max Jakobson, *38. kerros. Havaintoja ja muistiinpanoja vuosilta 1965–1971*. Keuruu: Otava 1983, pp. 203–204.

Security Council meeting at the government level was held. Foreign minister Väinö Leskinen delivered the first statement, followed by the great power representatives. After the closed session, the ministers issued a statement stressing the need to strengthen the Security Council and stated that periodic meetings of the Council were an important step in this direction. But, as Jakobson states, no periodic meetings followed the first one.³⁶

Finland's second term twenty years later, in 1989-90, naturally took place in a very different international atmosphere and situation, at the end of the Cold War.³⁷ The improved great power relations created a favourable basis for the action of the Council. This was crucial, especially after August 1990 when Iraq invaded and declared its intention to annex Kuwait. The Security Council condemned this aggression immediately and unanimously.

During the months that ensued, the Council was constantly preoccupied with the matter, requesting the Iraqi forces to withdraw from Kuwait without any conditions. When Iraq failed to do so, the Council adopted a number of resolutions introducing ever-tighter sanctions to compel Iraq to comply. At the end of the process came the authorization by the Council to use force to restore Kuwait's independence and, due to Iraq's non-compliance, the war to expel the Iraqi forces followed in early 1991.

Finland took an active part in the negotiations in the Council because the aggression was a clear violation of the UN Charter and because the Council acted under Chapter VII and in the spirit and letter of collective security. Finland participated in the Council negotiations and debate with eleven statements during the autumn. Foreign Minister Pertti Paasio – participating in an SC meeting arranged at the foreign minister level – reiterated in this context Finland's interest in “promoting the development of a peaceful and rational world order based on the uni-

³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 195–214.

³⁷ *Suomi YK:n turvallisuusneuvoston jäsenenä 1989–90*. Helsinki: Ulkoasiainministeriön julkaisu 11: 1991, provides a full report for this period and also includes all statements by Finland's representatives in the Security Council.

versal collective security system provided by the Charter”, and continued very strongly by saying: “Collective security implies in actual fact that the security of Kuwait is also the security of all other States, in particular of the smaller Member States”.³⁸ Thus the traditional strong Finnish emphasis on the small state perspective was in evidence even here, and very concrete in the context.

Apart from Iraq, the Security Council was again very busy with several protracted conflicts and violent incidents around the world, in the Middle East, Southern Africa and Central America. Finland stated its principled position with regard to each of them, and several times on Israel's policies in the occupied territories, among other things stating that the Israeli settlements in the occupied territories were a clear violation of international law. The emphasis on international law and the Charter provisions, as well as the fourth Geneva Convention, for example, was a recurring and natural theme in all Finnish statements, while with regard to every conflict issue the need for their peaceful resolution and the promotion of the peace process was obviously an integral part of Finnish statements.³⁹

As described earlier in the discussion on peacekeeping, Finland negotiated and introduced a unanimously adopted Security Council position, which was the first of its kind on peacekeeping and very important for Finland due to its long-standing interest in and input into peacekeeping.

Another case of special importance for Finland, also for historical reasons, was Namibia's independence. Finland had devoted a great deal of attention, diplomacy and political and economic support to that goal in previous decades; Martti Ahtisaari had a crucial role in the negotiations for years, Finnish peacekeepers constituted a major element in the successful UNTAG operation, and now Namibia was set to become a new member of the United Nations during Finland's Security Council membership. When welcoming Namibia, Ambassador Klaus Törnudd noted that admitting new members was a rare oc-

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 133–134.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104–105, 108–110, 113–114 119–120, 122, 137–139 and 148–149.

currence and that “it is an even rarer pleasure to do so when the New Member State in question is a nation for whose freedom and independence this Organization campaigned for so long and so hard”.⁴⁰

During the past decade Finland campaigned to attain a seat among the non-permanent members of the Security Council for the third time, for 2013-14. Had Finland succeeded, what added value would Finland’s membership have brought this time around? In its campaign, Finland stressed its past record as “a good global citizen”, as President Niinistö described the role, and continued:

“We wish to shoulder the responsibility that membership in the Council entails. We believe that we could make a contribution. Finland would approach issues on the Council’s agenda as an engaged member state. We would be ready to look for constructive and even-handed solutions to common problems. We believe that as a small and militarily non-allied member state we have got what it takes.”⁴¹

Finland has reiterated that peacekeeping will remain one of its focal points and contributions. In addition to peacekeeping, Finland has devoted more and more attention to civilian crisis management, and in this field there is much to be accomplished within the UN framework as well. Another focal point in Finland’s “programme” is mediation. Finland also has a long track record in this issue – stretching from Sinai and UNEF I and Cyprus until today – and a strong contribution to offer, as President Niinistö asserted, referring especially to President Ahtisaari’s decades-long career as a successful mediator in various conflicts.⁴² At the initiative of Finland and Turkey, the General Assembly adopted a resolution in the 66th session aimed at strengthening the normative basis of mediation. A related element in Finland’s approach is the emphasis on the role of women in the peace processes. Security Council resolution 1325 and Finland’s own activities

40 Ibid., p. 121.

41 <http://www.tpk.fi/public/default.aspx?contentid=258498&nodeid=44810&contentlan=2&culture=en-US>

42 Ibid.

for its implementation and promotion have paved the way for further action.

It is a well-known fact that Finland – like most, or perhaps even all member states – would be in favour of a UN reform that would affect the composition of the Security Council, but it is equally well-known that for the time being that situation is deadlocked, because the great powers in particular cannot agree on the future size and structure of the Council. But even without such a reform, it is possible to strengthen the Council, to improve its working methods and make full use of its capacity.

The Security Council is constantly available and alert to deal with any emerging crises. Many issues on its agenda are related to protracted conflicts and frozen situations, so also in the coming years the Security Council will have to tackle the manifold conflicts in the Middle East and Africa. Breakthroughs in peace processes are long overdue, and the Security Council has the special responsibility to act in accordance with the Charter. However, as is well demonstrated by previous experiences, the Security Council always has to face the challenge of sudden and unexpected incidents, crises and conflicts and to respond effectively.

One of the most tragic situations is currently unfolding in Syria, and the UN Security Council has not been able to take the leading role that the Charter prescribes to it. “All members of the Security Council must cooperate to find a way out of the crisis. The authority of the UN will suffer if the efforts to end the crisis will move elsewhere,” argued President Niinistö.⁴³

As Finland has had good relations with both China and Russia historically, would it be possible for Finland to explore ways of constructing a consensus in the Security Council that would speak for the whole international community and thus pave the way for a solution to the Syrian crisis? Only by finding a solution acceptable to all permanent members of the Security Council can the United Nations perform the role assigned to it.

President Niinistö concluded his speech in the General Assembly with this pledge:

43 Ibid.

“Finland will act in the Council in accordance with the UN Charter and on the basis of our values. We will work constructively and pragmatically, in order to maintain and strengthen international peace and security to the best of our ability.”⁴⁴

This constructive and pragmatic approach has characterized Finland’s “physician’s” role throughout its UN membership.

44 Ibid.

Photo: Eskinder Debebe / UN Photo



VII

SUMMING UP: CONTINUITY, CONSISTENCY, CREDIBILITY, AND CONSTRUCTIVISM

Finland's record in the UN is one of continuity and consistency. Many features that characterized its approach more than fifty years ago are still visible in its profile today. This is self-evident to some extent, of course, because Finland has been and will continue to be a small state. The emphasis on international law and the UN Charter naturally follow on from this.

However, certain features are explicit policy choices like the focus on and contribution to peacekeeping and disarmament. Continuity can thus be observed as a general policy line and in ways of reacting to emerging issues and changes in the international security environment. In fact, the degree of continuity in the basic philosophy or approach is even more remarkable when we consider the transition from the Cold War system to the post-Cold War system. After the end of the Cold War, the opportunity for the UN and its Security Council to act in the way envisaged, when the Charter was drafted, has increased considerably and it would be important to safeguard that opportunity and make full use of the UN system as a whole.

At the same time it has to be underlined that consistency in the Finnish approach has not meant and cannot imply stasis. Every country has to react all the time to new and changing events and situations. As early as the 1960s Finland adopted a more active role in the UN than the one it had in the beginning, and when the conditions were considered to be ripe for bolder, yet feasible initiatives, Finland seized the day and expanded its activities. It is obvious that the space for successful small state activism is more favourable in a relaxed international situation than at times of tension. In this sense the opportunities for Finland to act constructively in the United Nations have also improved since the Cold War and the country's accession to the European Union.

Credibility is one of Finland's strongest assets in the United Nations and in the international community as a whole. Finland has no hidden agenda or special interests in the United Nations, but endeavours to serve the interests of the whole international community – now and in the future with concrete, feasible and pragmatic contributions. Finland did not win a seat in the Security Council

for 2013–2014, but it will continue to work in the same way and for the same goals in the United Nations as it has done in the past and as it would have done in the Security Council.