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# INTERNATIONAL PEACE AND INTERNATIONAL LAW

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**Abstract:** This article examines the relationship between international law and the pursuit of lasting international peace. It asks whether peace can be achieved through war alone or whether it depends on legal rules, diplomacy, and international institutions. The article uses a qualitative, document-based approach, combining historical comparison with an analysis of relevant provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. It considers the Peace of Westphalia of 1648, the League of Nations after the First World War, the establishment of the United Nations after the Second World War, and the development of UN peacekeeping. The analysis suggests that the end of armed hostilities does not necessarily produce sustainable peace: unresolved grievances, mistrust, and weak mechanisms for cooperation may leave conditions for renewed conflict in place. The UN Charter provides a legal framework for peaceful settlement by requiring states to resolve disputes by peaceful means and to refrain from the unlawful threat or use of force. The article concludes that international law cannot eliminate political conflict, but it offers shared principles and procedures that can help manage disputes and support more durable peace. The study is limited to selected historical examples and legal documents and does not empirically measure the effectiveness of individual peacekeeping missions.
**Keywords:** international law; international peace; United Nations; peaceful settlement of disputes; state sovereignty; peacekeeping

## Introduction

Human history is often described as a history of wars. From early competition over land and resources to conflicts between states and empires, armed violence has repeatedly shaped political relations. Wars have also been driven by struggles for power, territorial expansion, and political influence. The development of industrial and nuclear weapons has made the consequences of large-scale conflict increasingly dangerous, extending the threat beyond individual states to the wider international community.

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The First and Second World Wars demonstrated the human and political costs of relying on force to settle disputes. The establishment of the League of Nations after the First World War and the United Nations after the Second World War reflected attempts to develop collective mechanisms for preventing conflict and maintaining international peace. Yet the persistence of armed conflicts raises an enduring question: can lasting peace be achieved through war, or does it require a rules-based international order supported by diplomacy and international institutions?

This article examines that question through selected historical examples and the legal framework of the United Nations. Its purpose is to explain how international legal principles and institutions contribute to peaceful dispute settlement, while recognising that law and institutions do not automatically prevent every conflict. The central argument is that the end of hostilities should not be confused with sustainable peace, which also requires political arrangements, respect for legal obligations, and continued cooperation.

**Methods**

The article uses a qualitative, document-based approach. It draws on selected historical examples discussed in the source text and examines relevant legal provisions of the Charter of the United Nations. The analysis is organised around three connected strands: historical comparison, legal-document analysis, and thematic interpretation.

Historical comparison is used to consider the Peace of Westphalia (1648), the League of Nations, and the establishment of the United Nations after the Second World War as different attempts to organise relations between states and reduce the risk of conflict. Legal-document analysis focuses particularly on Articles 2(3), 2(4), and 33 of the UN Charter, which address peaceful settlement and restrictions on the threat or use of force. Thematic interpretation is then used to identify what these historical and legal materials suggest about the distinction between ending a war and building lasting peace.

The method is limited in scope. The article does not present new empirical data, conduct interviews, or quantitatively evaluate the outcomes of international interventions. Its conclusions are analytical rather than statistical and should be understood as findings from the selected documents and examples, not as a comprehensive assessment of every conflict or peacekeeping operation

**Results**

Historical attempts to establish an international order

The historical examples considered in the article indicate that major wars have often been followed by efforts to establish new political arrangements. The Peace of Westphalia of 1648 brought the Thirty Years' War in Europe to an end and contributed to the evolution of diplomatic practices and ideas associated with state sovereignty.[1] It is more accurate, however, to treat Westphalia as one milestone in a longer process than as the single origin of the modern international system.

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peace_of_Westphalia

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The League of Nations was established after the First World War with the aim of promoting cooperation and preventing future conflicts.[2] Its inability to prevent the crises that led to the Second World War illustrates the limitations of international arrangements when collective action is insufficient. After the Second World War, the United Nations was established to provide a broader institutional framework for international cooperation and the maintenance of peace and security.

Legal obligations under the UN Charter

The UN Charter sets out key principles for managing international disputes. Article 2(3) requires UN Member States to settle their international disputes by peaceful means in a manner that does not endanger international peace and security or justice. Article 2(4) requires members to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the purposes of the United Nations.[3]

Article 33 identifies peaceful methods that parties to disputes should seek to use when the continuation of a dispute may endanger international peace and security. These methods include negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, recourse to regional arrangements, and other peaceful means chosen by the parties.[4] Together, these provisions establish a legal framework that favours peaceful settlement over unilateral resort to force.

Peacekeeping as part of a broader peace process

The United Nations' peacekeeping history provides an institutional example of efforts to contain conflict and support political processes. UN peacekeeping began in 1948, when the Security Council authorised the deployment of military observers to the Middle East to monitor an armistice agreement. Over time, peacekeeping operations developed beyond ceasefire monitoring and came to include support for implementing peace agreements, protecting civilians, monitoring human rights, strengthening institutions, and assisting with the disarmament and reintegration of former combatants.[5] The material reviewed therefore points to a recurring distinction: stopping immediate violence is important, but it does not by itself resolve the political, social, or security issues that may have caused the conflict. The historical examples and legal provisions both emphasise the need for arrangements that continue beyond the end of active fighting.

**Discussion**

The results support a qualified answer to the question of whether peace can be achieved through war. Military action may sometimes change the conditions of a conflict or bring a period of fighting to an end, but the end of hostilities is not equivalent to sustainable peace. Where underlying disputes remain unresolved and mistrust persists, a ceasefire or post-war settlement may prove fragile.

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[2] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/League_of_Nations

[3] United Nations. Charter of the United Nations (1945), especially Articles 2(3), 2(4), and 33. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text

[4] United Nations. Charter of the United Nations (1945), especially Articles 2(3), 2(4), and 33. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text

[5] United Nations Peacekeeping. "Our History." https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-history

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The Peace of Westphalia, the League of Nations, and the United Nations represent different historical responses to the problem of war. They should not be treated as identical institutions or as evidence of a simple, uninterrupted progression toward peace. Rather, they illustrate continuing efforts to create rules and procedures for managing relations between states. The experience of the League of Nations also shows that establishing an institution is not enough by itself; its effectiveness depends on political support and the willingness of states to act collectively.

The UN Charter offers a particularly important normative framework because it states obligations concerning peaceful settlement and the threat or use of force. These provisions do not remove political disagreements or guarantee compliance in every situation. Their importance lies in articulating common legal standards and identifying peaceful procedures that states can use to address disputes. Their practical effectiveness depends on implementation, institutional capacity, and the political choices of states.

Peacekeeping should likewise be understood as one instrument within a wider political process, rather than as a substitute for a negotiated settlement. UN materials describe peacekeeping as having evolved from monitoring ceasefires to supporting more complex peace processes.[6] This development reinforces the argument that lasting peace requires a combination of security, political agreement, legal commitments, and institutional support.

A limitation of this article is that it analyses selected historical episodes and legal documents rather than comparing a broad set of contemporary conflicts or measuring peacekeeping outcomes. Further research could examine particular cases in greater depth, compare the implementation of peace agreements, or assess how political support affects the application of international legal obligations. Such work would be needed before making stronger claims about the relative effectiveness of particular peace mechanisms.

**Conclusion**

This article has examined the relationship between international law and lasting peace through selected historical examples and provisions of the UN Charter. The analysis suggests that the end of a war does not automatically create stable peace. The Peace of Westphalia, the experience of the League of Nations, and the creation and peacekeeping work of the United Nations demonstrate continuing attempts to manage disputes through agreements, institutions, and shared principles.

Articles 2(3), 2(4), and 33 of the UN Charter establish important obligations and procedures for peaceful dispute settlement and restrict the threat or use of force in international relations. Although these rules cannot prevent every conflict, they provide a common legal framework for state conduct and for efforts to resolve disputes without further violence. Sustainable peace therefore depends not only on ending hostilities, but also on political agreements, respect for international law, diplomacy, confidence-building, and effective international cooperation.

[6] United Nations Peacekeeping. “Our History.” https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/our-history

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The central challenge for the international community is not merely to end wars, but to develop and maintain an international order in which disputes are more likely to be addressed through lawful and peaceful means.

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