

Bertrand G. Ramcharan

INTERNATIONAL PEACE CONFERENCES

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By

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This led to the envoys of both parties...talking of peace. At first, heralds went over and concluded a truce, by virtue of which the Duke of Orleans was permitted to leave Novara and received food for his troops. Hereupon negotiations were opened as to the peace itself. There sat in Lodovico's chamber, himself, his wife, and the envoys of the League, on one side of the table, and on the other the French; at the end were two secretaries for the two parties and the two languages, and the negotiations were carried on between them. When one, two, or three Frenchman all began talking at once, Lodovico interrupted them with 'Ho, ho! One at a time' and thereupon himself carried on the conversation. He brought it about that, at the expiration of fourteen days, on the 9th October (1496) all parties were agreed.

LEOPOLD VON RANKE, *History of the Latin and Teutonic Nations from 1494 to 1514*. London, George Bell and Sons, York Street, Covent Garden, 1887, pp. 85–86.



Foreword

This is an important and innovative book. It presents a unique historical study of international peace conferences and performs a helpful service in highlighting the many achievements of the United Nations in its largest ever peace-keeping operation, in the former Yugoslavia, which, at its peak, had an authorised strength of up of 50,000 peacekeepers. It also shows that where success eluded the UN this was not because of a lack of heart but because of the non-cooperation of parties on the ground or of great powers pursuing their own agendas instead of those they had agreed upon in the Security Council.

The United Nations, even with its limitations, has special characteristics that are quite different to those of a Great Power. This is why it enjoys the trust of most Governments and peoples the world over. The fact that it is an Organization representing the whole of humanity requires it to act as a servant of the peoples of the world, even when dealing with reprehensible factions. The United Nations engages in cooperative diplomacy. Without the cooperation of parties and of powers directly concerned it can achieve little. A Great Power can resort to what some American writers have termed 'coercive diplomacy'.

The United Nations had good peace plans for Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the Vance-Owen plan which I helped negotiate. But the plan, as other UN-EU plans, could not stick because leading powers chose to arm some of the parties and to encourage them to fight. How could the UN achieve a negotiated peace when some of the parties were being armed and pushed to fight?

When the major powers were ready, they used coercive diplomacy and brought the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina to an end with the conclusion of the Dayton Accord on 21 November, 1995. From the spring of 1993 to the autumn of 1995, UN-EU negotiators strived with guts and determination to help end the war but could not clinch a deal because the pre-eminent power was not yet ready. When it was, coercive diplomacy brought the conflict to an end. In the intervening period, many tens of thousands of people died during the continuing conflict. This is a salutary lesson that scholars and historians will hopefully reflect upon.

While the Bosnian conflict dragged on because of the policies of major powers, the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, a joint enterprise between the United Nations and the European Union, helped, as this book shows, to contain conflict in Croatia, prevent conflict in Macedonia – with the first ever preventive deployment of UN peacekeepers, contain the dispute

between Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Yugoslavia (FYROM), negotiate an Interim Agreement between Greece and the FYROM that resolved the bulk of their differences except for the disagreement over the name of the FYROM, negotiate a peace agreement for the Danube region of Croatia, provide humanitarian assistance to some three million people in the most difficult circumstances, highlight human rights violations, conduct peacekeeping in harrowing circumstances, with parties seeking to use the presence of the peacekeepers for their own advantage, and negotiate cooperative relations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

The United Nations did, as this book shows, practice the Art of the Possible in Peacemaking, Peacekeeping and Humanitarianism. The author is in a unique position to marshal the evidence for this. For three and a half years he supported the peacemakers of the ICFY, including myself, and served as Director of ICFY. For the better part of 1993 he also served simultaneously as the Director of the Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, my good friend Thorvald Stoltenberg, who led all UN operations on the ground, peacemaking, peacekeeping and humanitarian. The author is in a unique position to tell about the UN contributions and tribulations.

During the better part of a year that I served as Chairman of ICFY's Working Group on Bosnia and Herzegovina it was my good fortune to have enjoyed the support and friendship of the author and it therefore gives me great pleasure to commend this historic book on International Peace Conferences, and on the Art of the Possible in UN Peacemaking, Peacekeeping and Humanitarianism.

Martti Ahtisaari
Helsinki

Preface

This book has emerged out of our experience as Director of a rather innovative peacemaking, peacekeeping and humanitarian initiative, the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, between 1992 and 1996. What was particularly striking about this conference was the experiment of two full-time Co-Chairmen, one from the United Nations and one from the European Union, who laboured tirelessly for peace in different parts of the former Yugoslavia for three and a half years.

We were fortunate to have been part of the Secretariat from the outset, in September, 1992, and witnessed its efforts throughout, until its closure at the end of March, 1996. At the beginning, there were few historical insights to draw upon. The London Conference on Yugoslavia, held in August, 1992, had been more in the nature of a classical, deliberative peace conference. It was the London Conference that had decided on a full-time International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, with two full-time Co-Chairmen, both former Foreign Ministers, and with six Working Groups, essentially negotiating groups, some of whom served full-time, such as the Chairman of the Working Group on Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Working Group on Ethnic Communities, Nationalities and Minorities.

But the strategies and organization of the conference had to be pieced together from start by the Co-Chairmen and their colleagues. Over the years we have found ourselves reflecting on whether there might have been experiences of international peace conferences that might have been useful at the beginning of this process. This has led us to research and to offer, in Part One of this book, a conspectus on the role of international peace conferences in history.

In Part Two we offer a case study of the strategies and experiences of the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia. We found that however hard the negotiators tried, they could not clinch peace agreements without the support of major powers, especially the pre-eminent power of the time, the USA. We discuss this experience through the lens of the art of the possible in UN peacemaking, peacekeeping, and humanitarianism.

At the end there are two selected bibliographies for further guidance.

We are grateful to President Martti Ahtisaari, Nobel Peace Laureate and Former President of Finland, and a respected friend and colleague in the Yugoslav peace efforts, for writing a generous Foreword to the book.

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PART 2

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PART 1

International Peace Conferences



Introduction

Appearing on the 'Charlie Rose' current affairs programme on public television in New York on 6 August, 2012, former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger discussed the conflict in Syria and the stalemate in the search for a settlement. When Mr Rose asked him what he thought might be a way forward, he thought aloud that an international conference of the USA, Russia, and China, together with other powers, might be able to work out the elements of a solution. It remained to be seen whether it would succeed, but he thought that the option was worth considering.

Mr Rose then asked him whether Iran should be invited to such a conference as a country with interests and influence in the conflict. He recognized that Iran had the capacity to influence developments on the ground but alluded to political difficulties that would arise, having regard to international sanctions that had been imposed on it on account of its nuclear policy. If an agreement were reached beforehand with Iran on the issue of its nuclear ambitions then it could be invited. As will be seen in this book participation and procedure in international peace conferences can be problematic.

Five weeks earlier, in an effort to support the implementation of Special Envoy Kofi Annan's six point plan for Syria, a one-day international conference had been convened in Geneva on 30 June, but there had been differences between the USA, on the one hand, and Russia and China on the other hand, on the future of Syrian President Bashar Assad. Iran and Saudi Arabia, two countries with interests in the conflict, had not been invited to participate in the meeting.

Were another international conference to be held, as suggested by Secretary Kissinger, it would not be the first time that the international community had resorted to the idea of an international conference in a desperate situation. This approach has been tried time and time again. The London Conference of 1992 on Yugoslavia was a case in point. It had been called in a desperate effort to come up with ideas for peace in the deadliest conflict in Europe since the end of World War II. And, as we shall see later in this book, after the US-led coalition had invaded Afghanistan in 2001, the method used for charting the way forward was to convene the Bonn Conference on Afghanistan at the end of 2001. The Bonn Conference of 2001 and a follow-up conference a decade later, in 2011, helped put together building blocks for rebuilding Afghanistan as a country.

For many centuries now, international peace conferences have been used to help in the search for peace in a variety of situations. Yet, international peace

conferences, as a genre – as opposed to individual conferences, have not been considered much in the literature even though, taken together historically, they represent a substantial component of institutions for global governance. There are notable studies on particular conferences such as those of Westphalia, Vienna, Paris, and San Francisco.¹ But there have been few attempts to draw insights from them that might be helpful in the quest for peace in our times. And there are powerful insights indeed.

It is little known, for example, that the Vienna Congress of 1814–15 laid the foundations for the abolition of slavery and gave us the first recorded agreement for the protection of minorities. Earlier, the Congress of Westphalia had, in the Treaty of Osnabruck, recognised some rights for religious minorities. The strategies of the Vienna Congress provided building blocks for preventive diplomacy and for the peace and security systems of the League of Nations and the United Nations. The Central American peace processes of the 1980s gave a strategic role to confidence-building and to human rights strategies that the international community is still seeking to emulate in dealing with conflict situations in our times. This book seeks to draw together some strands from international peace conferences of the past that might be helpful in the quest for peace in the future.

Starting during the period of the Renaissance and continuing during the Westphalian, Vienna, post-Vienna, League of Nations, and United Nations orders, one finds numerous examples of international peace conferences – buffeted by competing political perspectives, and by the interests of major powers, global and regional.

Taken together, it will be submitted in this book that international peace conferences have made foundation contributions in at least seven areas: first, in arranging for regional or international orders: Westphalia provided a regional order for Europe that would be extended later to the rest of the world. Paris, 1919 and San-Francisco, 1945, gave us the League of Nations and United Nations experiments. Second, it has been suggested that there is a straight line running from the balance of power system in Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to the collective security experiments of the twentieth century. Third, international peace conferences have performed as instruments of global governance. One could see this with great conferences that led to peace settlements, such as that of Dayton in 1995, which ended the most serious conflict in Europe since the Second World War. Fourth, international peace conferences have contributed to post-war settlements, as in the case of the peace treaties concluded at Versailles in 1919 and the 1920s and at Paris in

1 See the bibliography at the end of this book.

1946–47. Fifth, international peace conferences have given us experiences in arrangements for conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy. The concert system introduced after the Vienna Congress of 1815 is an example of this. Sixth, international peace conferences have contributed to confidence-building – or what would be considered peacebuilding in our times. The Central American Peace Conference of 1907 is a good example of this, as are the Contadora and Esquipulas peace processes. And, seventh, starting from Westphalia to our times, international peace conferences have contributed to efforts for the promotion and protection of human rights.

It will not always be straightforward to distinguish between a peace process and a peace conference and some flexibility is needed on this point. The oldest surviving peace treaty,² concluded between Ramses II of Egypt and the Hittite King, Hatti Hattusili III in 1280 BC³ followed wars between the two countries, and diplomatic negotiations by their representatives. We do not know the format of the negotiations and whether they might have had conference dimensions. After the conclusion of the treaty the Hittite King visited his Egyptian counterpart in what one source claims might have been the first summit meeting in history of the leaders of two countries.⁴

Charlemagne convened periodic assemblies of representatives of the territorial units under his sovereignty, but these were probably not peace conferences as such.⁵ However, the Contadora/Esquipulas processes in the 1980s involved successive meetings of leaders of Central American and other nations who adopted broad declarations of policy and facilitated the conclusion of treaties. As far as we know there was no organized conference structure as such but what took place involved, essentially, successive regional peace conferences.

A clear early initiative for a peace conference was the proposal of September 1443 by Filippo Maria Visconti for joint action by Florence, Venice and Milan to end the war between Francisco Sforza and the Pope. Visconti proposed, among other things, a peace congress, which did meet, but came to little result. However Pope Nicholas V followed up by convening a peace congress eleven

² Some accounts consider it a treaty of alliance.

³ Some accounts give it the date of 1259 BC. See “Egyptian-Hittite Peace Treaty (1259 BCE)”. Commentary by P.J. Brand, University of Memphis, <http://www.milestonedocuments.com/view/egyptian-hittite-peace-treaty/i>, consulted on 25 June, 2012.

⁴ S.M. Arab, MD., “The Pharaoh Who Made Peace with his Enemies and the First Peace Treaty in History,” <http://www.arabworldbooks.com/ramses.htm>, consulted on 25 June, 2012.

⁵ See <http://history-world.org/charlemagne.htm>: Holy Roman Empire. Author: Guizot, Francois P.G., consulted 24 September, 2012.

years later, in 1454, which produced significant peace agreements. One can find subsequently in the historical records peace conferences and treaties at Calais and Bruges in 1521, at Cercamp in 1558, at Le Cateau in 1559, and at Munster/Osnabruck/Westphalia between 1644 and 1688.

Thereafter, there was the Vienna Congress in 1814–15, the Congress of Berlin in 1878, the Hague Peace Conferences of 1899 and 1907, the Central American Peace Conference held in Washington in 1907, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919, the Paris Peace Conference 1948, the Round Table Conference on Indonesia 1949, the Japanese Peace Conference held in San Francisco, 1951, the Geneva Conference on Indo-China, 1954, the London Conference on Cyprus, 1959, the Geneva Conference on Laos, 1962, the Geneva Conference on the Middle East, 1973, the Paris Talks on Vietnam, 1969–73, the International Conference on Kampuchea, 1981, the Contadora/Esquipulas Central American peace processes of the 1980s, the International Conference on Kampuchea, 1989, the European Community Conference on Yugoslavia, 1991, the London Conference on Yugoslavia, 1992, the International Conference on the Former Yugoslavia, 1992, various Middle East Peace Processes such as the Quartet of the present time, and international conferences on Afghanistan and Syria. One could also possibly include some Camp David talks on the Middle East as international peace conferences.

There have been peace negotiations that have resembled international peace conferences, such as the peace processes on Vietnam, South Africa and Afghanistan. Some of them had features well worth remembering. As we have already said, the dividing line is not a clear-cut one.

The international peace conferences of primary interest in this book are those that provided frameworks for peace, or involved negotiations for peace, as opposed to the promotion of peace generally.⁶ However, the Hague Peace conferences of 1899 and 1907, are in a special category inasmuch as they led to major codifications of the Laws of War and to the establishment of the Permanent Court of Arbitration.

Historically, aside from the peace process between Egypt and the Hittites in 1280 BC, we have not come across any other recorded example of an international peace conference in non-European experiences. The origins of the concept of an international peace conference are to be found mainly in the

6 See, for example, http://peace.maripo.com/p_conferences.htm, “145 International Peace Conferences over the years.” Consulted on 18 October, 2011. See also <http://histclo.com/essay/war/peace/war-peace.html>: War and Social Upheaval: Peace Conferences, consulted on 24 September, 2012.