

## War and Peacekeeping: Personal Reflections on Conflict and Lasting Peace

by *Martin Bell*

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Martin Bell's book is a notable addition to the literature on conflict journalism and international peacekeeping efforts. In "War and Peacekeeping: Personal Reflections on Conflict and Lasting Peace," Bell provides a compelling and insightful perspective on the complexities of war zones, the role of peacekeepers, the cost of human life, and the ethical dilemmas faced by those involved in the war. Bell's book is a captivating journey through his life, transitioning from a soldier to a war journalist and becoming a UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. With insightful lessons from varied experiences, the book focuses on the realities of conflict zones, with particular attention to UN peacekeepers.

The book is divided into nineteen chapters, each covering a different aspect of war and peacekeeping. Bell, who has worked in more than 120 countries, "In a life of accidental episodes," he writes, "I have been a soldier, a war reporter, a Member of Parliament, a UNICEF ambassador, a battlefield target, a war crimes witness, a writer, a poet, an ethics adviser, a lecturer, and an incorrigible wanderer." Through his stories and personal experiences, the author covers various topics related to soldiering, war reporting, and ethical dilemmas. In the opening chapters of the book, he shares his experiences of being a soldier on the ground and later as a war reporter, dealing with the complexities involved in covering war-torn regions. Drawing from personal experiences, he perfectly mentioned the devastating human cost of the war and the futility of armed conflict in the following words: "We have lived through the most miraculous times of more than seventy years of global peace: how long can we last before the Third World War? There are no winners in warfare but only losers."

The central theme of the book is the effect of war on both individuals and societies. Bell, as a war journalist, depicts his firsthand encounters of witnessing the Srebrenica massacre and the indiscriminate attacks in Yemen, which resulted in numerous human casualties. His account offers a distressing illustration of the profound human tragedy often resulting from armed conflicts. In his analysis, he argues that the psychological toll of war on individuals is unmeasurable, which makes it difficult to

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readjust to civilian life. The author vividly depicts the horrors of war and highlights the international community's failure to prevent genocides and bloodshed. From Africa to the Middle East and Europe, the world bore witness to mass massacres that could have been averted. Within the pages of his book, the author documents numerous instances where the blue helmets, entrusted with the protection of civilians, faltered. Despite clear mandates, there were cases where UN peacekeepers failed to take timely and appropriate action. One such instance occurred in South Sudan, where aid workers were killed near a UN troops camp. Subsequent investigation reports acknowledged shortcomings such as lack of preparedness, ineffective command and control, and an inward-looking attitude among the peacekeepers.

He further draws upon his experiences as a war correspondent in conflict-ridden regions like Bosnia and Rwanda. In these instances, peacekeeping initiatives proved ineffective in preventing acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing. For Bell, the peacekeeping efforts should be tailored to suit the conflict zone's requirements, keeping their political, social, and cultural dynamics in mind. Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, who also served as head of the UN Peacekeeping Department, candidly admitted that more could have been done to prevent the Rwandan Genocide. Reflecting on the Srebrenica events, he underscored the failure of the international community to take decisive action, leading to bloodshed during wartime. Annan acknowledged the existing loopholes in the UN Peacekeeping Department's powers to enforce peace effectively.

Moreover, he delves into the comprehensive analysis of the peacekeeping efforts and their challenges. In assessing the peacekeeping efforts, the author argues that political, logistic, and resource-related obstacles usually hinder these efforts. Through his reasoning, Bell pointed out several obstacles, such as a lack of well-defined objectives, insufficient resources, and the divergent interests of the parties involved in the peacekeeping efforts. While UN peacekeeping gradually evolved, it learned from challenges, drawbacks, and opportunities that arose over time. This learning process involved understanding what actions to take and what to avoid. The transformation of peacekeeping from an initiative into a practical approach took years and came at the cost of numerous civilian lives. It is essential to commend the commendable sacrifices made by the blue helmets to pursue peace.

He also illustrates the significant function of the media in influencing the public's understanding of peacekeeping endeavors and delves into the intricate connection between the military and the media. Drawing upon his encounters in Bosnia and Somalia, the author asserts that it is the ethical duty of journalists to communicate the actualities of conflict and peacekeeping efforts, all the while recognizing the difficulties of upholding objectivity and impartiality amid distressing occurrences.

In response, he also looks into the challenges journalists face during the missions, such as the risk of being targeted by the combatants and the difficulties of assessing accurate information and reporting on sensitive issues such as atrocities and human rights violations. Bell succinctly captures the challenges of war reporting in one line, 'War reporting, like UN Peacekeeping, comes at the price paid in blood.' Bell stresses the crucial role of journalists in bearing witness to the realities of war and giving evidence at war crime tribunals. However, he also calls attention to the fact that American soldiers do not typically participate in peacekeeping missions, and American journalists do not bear witness to conflict. This critique underscores the importance of international collaboration and accountability in peacekeeping efforts and war reporting.

The major strength of this book is the analysis of the human dimensions of the conflict and the peacekeeping efforts. Through his experience, he explores different kinds of cases where humans were affected by the horrors of the war, including the psychological impact of observing atrocities. This comprehensive analysis shows the book's commitment to raising awareness and promoting understanding of the human cost of war.

There is a notable limitation in the book as the perspectives of peacekeepers and UN officials on the events are limited, creating a gap for readers to grasp both sides of the story entirely. Regardless, the central message of 'War and Peacekeeping' is clear: to comprehend the intricacies of war and work towards lasting peace, it is imperative to acknowledge the human stories and suffering that often remain obscured amid geopolitical analyses and strategic considerations. Bell's book is essential to understanding the conflict zone's operational challenges and power dynamics.

Nevertheless, as the peacekeeping doctrine evolves, it becomes increasingly intricate. Peacekeeping missions worldwide confront a myriad of challenges, backlash, and hardships. Bell, through the pictorial content in his book and experiences as a war journalist, vividly illustrates and brings attention to these issues.

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