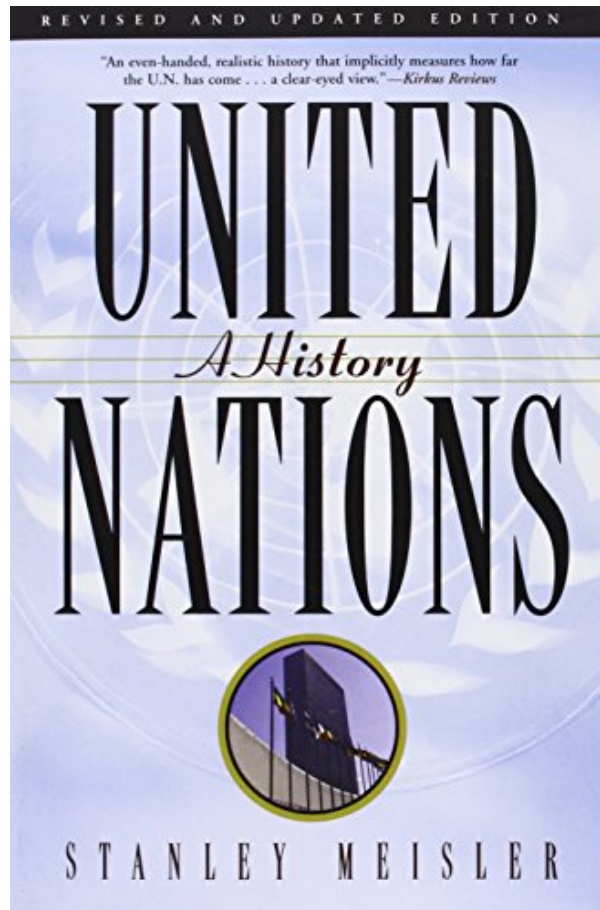


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Review

“Balanced and insightful, this book is a must for anyone who wants to understand where the U.N. has been and, more importantly, how we might best use its potential for the future.” —Thomas R. Pickering, U.S. ambassador to Russia and former ambassador to the U.N.

“Stanley Meisler tells the story of the United Nations, its promise and its problems, with clarity and authority. He brings to life the history of the world organization and [65 years] of America’s hopes for and frustration with the world government... This is a definitive account of the United Nations for a general audience, told by a master.” —Jim Hoagland, chief foreign correspondent, The Washington Post

About the Author

Stanley Meisler, the author of three books, served as a Los Angeles Times foreign and diplomatic correspondent for thirty years, assigned to Nairobi, Mexico City, Madrid, Toronto, Paris, the United Nations and Washington. He still contributes articles to the Times and writes a commentary for his website, stanleymeisler.com.

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United Nations: A History begins with its creation in 1945. Although the organization was created to prevent war, many conflicts have arisen, ranging from The Korean War, to The Six Day War, to genocide in Bosnia and Rwanda. Stanley Meisler's in-depth research examines the crises and many key political leaders. In this second edition, Meisler brings his popular history up to date with accounts of the power struggles of the last fifteen years, specifically spotlighting the terms of secretaries-general Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Kofi Annan and Ban Ki-moon. This is an important, riveting, and impartial guide through the past and recent events of the sixty-five-year history of the United Nations.

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Decent History of the United Nations

By Andrew

With the Second World War winding down, leaders of the victorious nations met to lay down plans for some kind of world organization. After the deadliest war in world history, people wanted the means to prevent another catastrophe from happening again. Lessons were learned from the past. Even when the United Nations was being created, the absolute failure of its predecessor, the League of Nations, to prevent World

War II probably loomed heavily on many peoples' mind.

Meisler's book looks at the major events in the often tumultuous history of the United Nations. The U.N. first came into existence in 1945. It was established with the high hopes of trying to prevent war and seeking peaceful solutions to world conflict. These high hopes were immediately crushed as the Cold War started. Since both the United States and the Soviet Union had veto power in the Security Council, the U.N. was incapable of doing much if it affected either side in the Cold War, which much of the world was.

There were some bright spots. The U.N. was able to claim a moral victory in the Korean War. Although that was blighted slightly by the fact that the U.N. was only able to get involved because the Soviet Union was boycotting Security Council meetings at the time and the U.N. forces essentially became a tool of U.S. foreign policy. The U.N. was also involved in the Suez Crisis and helped bring it to a peaceful end.

Not all events were successes. The U.N. attempted to seek a peace in the Vietnam War, but was pushed aside. Peace only came through direct brokering between American and Vietnamese diplomats without the U.N. The U.N. also got heavily involved in a crisis in the Congo in the 1960s.

The reputation of the United Nations seriously fell during the 1970s and 1980s. With decolonization and independence movements sweeping the world, the U.N. General Assembly became proliferated by Third World governments. Large powers, such as the United States, lost influence. In fact, one observer in the book was quoted as saying the most influential country in the General Assembly during that period was probably Algeria.

After the Cold War ended around 1990, the United Nations was able to flex its muscles a little more in world events. The U.N. was an important player during the Persian Gulf War during 1990-91. The number of peacekeeping missions started to increase. The U.N. was not always as influential as it wanted to be, though. In 2003, the United States would invade Iraq. The invasion was never approved by the Security Council. Then Secretary-General Kofi Annan later called the action "illegal" under the U.N. Charter.

Besides the major events in United Nations history, the book also includes information on the eight men to have served as Secretary-General. The book looks at their basic biographical information, their rise to power and what led to their elections as Secretary-General, and at their style and influence at the U.N. and in world affairs.

I only really have two criticisms of the book. The first is that the book is often written from an American-centric point-of-view. Although it is not really surprising considering the influence the United States has had, a more neutral viewpoint would have been better. The other is that there is little information regarding the history of the U.N.'s more prominent agencies, like UNICEF. Most of the attention is given to the General Assembly and the Security Council.

Overall, I enjoyed this book. It contains some of the most important world events the United Nations has been involved in since its inception and looks at some of the most prominent people to have worked there. I would recommend this book to those interested in the United Nations.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

Excellent introductory primer of the international body

By Battleship

Stanley Meisler wrote an informative book with a smooth literary style. This book provides essential information about the formation and history of the international organization. Meisler covers the highlights

and lowlights of the administrations of the Secretary Generals. He gives detailed coverage of each leader.

Meisler does an excellent job of identifying the successes and failures of the organization. This gives him great credibility because I've read another book on the organization that glossed over the structural weaknesses and occasional failed military interventions of the organization. The author is never afraid to address controversial topics, such as the connection of Kurt Waldheim with the Nazi Party.

Meisler is a supporter of the organization. He is a realist who celebrates the diplomatic successes of the representative body and gives constructive criticism of how the organization can be more effective and avoid the negative press of the detractors. I found this to be a well-organized with measured and highly credible analysis. I learned a lot about the history of the UN by reading this book. It was very enlightening and it was an easy read.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A Valuable History from Someone Who Watched Up Close the Birth and Growth of the UN

By Claude Forthomme (Nougat)

Stanley Meisler is a professional journalist with experience of the UN since it was created in 1948 and up to the present (this is a revised edition), and none more than him has come to know the United Nations so intimately. He is also gifted with a talent for description and his book never slows down, it is a fascinating read. Highly recommended, particularly if you are interested in the political history of the United Nations. It is however a little short on the other aspect of the UN system, the specialized agencies. There are only passing remarks concerning them. Nonetheless, for anyone interested in a book focused on the UN in New York, this is a must read.

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