The United Nations

International Organization and World Politics

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Preface

The United Nations is now in its fifth decade. It is an established part of the international scene and an important arena for international politics. The national interests of states and frequently the well-being of individuals are affected by what goes on there. Much of international affairs can be understood without reference to the United Nations, but no one's understanding of international politics is complete without knowledge of the United Nations and its processes.

The earliest modern international organizations emerged during the nineteenth century because bilateral diplomacy, and occasional international conferences, proved insufficient to cope with the full range of interstate contacts made possible by developing technology. The problem has since been magnified many times in the wake of a scientific revolution that threatens to outrun human capacity for social inventiveness. The continued growth of international organization—represented in this study by the United Nations and its family of related agencies—is a vast extension of the nineteenth-century effort to come to terms politically with a technologically shrinking, technologically endangered world.

Our treatment of the United Nations in this book is not governed by any single approach to the subject. We draw liberally on history because current organizational arrangements cannot be understood without some knowledge of their ancestry and evolution. We also have concern for institutional forms and structures. Institutions help shape outcomes by setting the limits within which power is exercised and by affecting the way states and other actors communicate with one another. Those matters are addressed specifically in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, but illustrations of institutional impact are found in the chapters dealing with substantive UN activities as well. If there is a special emphasis, it is on UN political processes and the way they affect the distribution of rewards and burdens among states. In surveying "who gets what, when, and how" within the international system, we have repeatedly addressed this question: What difference does the United Nations make?

Although we have tried to be objective in this study, our work has been underpinned by certain normative assumptions. Among them are an acceptance of the necessity of international organization in the contemporary world, a commitment to

the democratic processes of decision making through discussion and consensus, and a preference for political pluralism. We have tried to capture the weaknesses and shortcomings of the UN system at the same time that we have noted its strengths and, occasionally, its operational vigor. The United Nations of today is not the same as it was forty years ago, and further change is certain in the decades ahead. Although change is not always progress, we harbor the hope that institutions for international cooperation will one day prove equal to the tasks laid on them. Such an evolution can occur, however, only if national leaders and peoples cultivate what Secretary-General U Thant once called the "common interests based on our habitation of the same planet." Recognition of those common interests provides a focus for our analysis of the United Nations and the role of international organization in the contemporary world.

We acknowledge the help of others in the preparation of this book. Although responsibility for errors rests solely with us, many people share the credit for any merit the book may have. Not least among them are Clarence A. Berdahl, Leland M. Goodrich, and Llewellyn Pfankuchen, who years ago provided intellectual guidance and personal encouragement to us as young scholars embarking on the serious study of international organization. Since then, we have been fortunate in having had good students and good colleagues whose wisdom and spirit of inquiry helped broaden our understanding of this complex and fascinating field. We acknowledge more specific debts as well. Louis Beres, Patrick Callahan, Robert B. Charlick, George A. Codding, Jr., Lawrence Gould, Joseph Lepgold, and Jay Charles Plano read the manuscript in its entirety and offered many helpful suggestions. The book is better because of their thoughtful criticism. Kurt C. Faux, Lorie A. Heimbuck, Robert L. Maxwell, and Theo Sypris rendered skilled, conscientious, indispensable research assistance. In the production of the manuscript, Dorothea Bradford Barr and Mari Miles consistently went beyond the call of duty in meeting deadlines and turning out accurate copy, all with unfailing good humor. To all of these we express gratitude.

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The United Nations in Historical Perspective

International organization can be traced back in history to the time when human beings first began to live in political communities. The ancient Greek city-states attempted through the Achaean League to build a system that would discourage rivalry and conflict and encourage some measure of cooperation. A thread runs through history from these early and rudimentary peace efforts to the contemporary world of the United Nations. Despite monumental and continuing failures to eliminate war, peoples and governments continue to reach beyond existing political boundaries to build on the orderly, brotherly, and cooperative side of human nature rather than give free rein to the suspicious, destructive, dark side. The founding of the United Nations is in this tradition. While falling short of its high ideals and purposes, the UN system nevertheless represents that human outreach toward peace and cooperation. In this chapter we will place the United Nations in historical perspective by looking at the modern state system that gave rise to it, describing the emergence of earlier international institutions, and briefly reviewing events leading to the establishment of the United Nations at the end of World War II. In the chapter that follows, the structure and operation of the United Nations will be discussed.

THE STATE SYSTEM AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Since its legal inception in the Peace of Westphalia in 1648, the modern state system has been characterized by powerful centrifugal forces producing disunity and conflict. Simultaneously, other forces have moved peoples and nations toward closer cooperation.

As the many separate political units created during the European feudal era were fused into larger communities, the national state, on which the contemporary UN system rests, began to emerge as the dominant political unit. The number of small

political entities was progressively reduced through conquest and annexation. Contacts among the new states increased as the larger community of Europe began to take shape. In addition, a new awakening occurred in the realm of economic activity. As trade and commerce flourished, mankind's concern with material enrichment became a powerful force affecting political rivalries. Rules were established under which the conflicts that inevitably arise through commercial intercourse could be adjusted. A rudimentary development of international law and consular interchange appeared in response to these needs. As trade competition among the new nations increased, it began to spill over into a race to acquire overseas colonies. This, in turn, produced a need for international rules by which nations could recognize one another's titles to new lands, settle boundary disputes, and undertake joint action against piracy. Nations began to deal more directly with such problems by entering into agreements and treaties with one another. Hence rivalries and antagonisms, while continuing to grow, tended to produce countervailing forces leading to increased cooperation.

Near the end of the eighteenth century, powerful new political forces evolved that have had a profound effect on the nature of the state system. These were the twin concepts of laissez-faire and democratic nationalism, each of which dramatically recognized the new role to be played by the individual in human affairs. At the same time the philosophy of laissez-faire was buttressed by a new technology that provided the means for producing goods with machines. The Industrial Revolution not only radically changed the economic methods of production but also spectacularly increased the interdependence of states.

The forces of science and invention responsible for developing the new machine technology also helped shrink the world through new and better devices for communication and transportation. The steamship, railroads, telegraph, and telephone made closer contacts possible, accelerated trade expansion, and produced a new awareness in the mind of Western man of his common societal relationship in a larger community of nations. Thus, in a progressive and dramatic way, the old patterns of individual and national self-sufficiency began to erode and give way to new and rapidly developing systems of interdependence, which, in turn, produced the rudiments of a new philosophy of internationalism among Western nations. Closer international cooperation and codes of international law began to develop as the respect and freedom accorded the individual within these nations increased. It has not been a historical accident that modern international law and institutions have been created largely at the initiative of those nations enjoying the greatest measure of freedom.

The Process of International Organization

With the appearance of democracy in the Western world, the stage was set for the emergence of modern international organization. Democracy in national government fostered the growth of international organization because both involve, in essence, commitment to a *consensual process*. Just as democracy in a national political

setting implies a process of public decision making by consent of the governed, international organization implies a process of international action through the consent of states.

The process of international organization is thoroughly pragmatic—most, if not all, international institutions have been created to achieve specific, practical objectives. The process assumes the multistate system as fact and seeks only to provide an effective means to reconcile the conflicts and contradictions that emerge from this system. As Dag Hammarskjöld, the second Secretary-General of the United Nations, observed,

> The United Nations is not in any respect a superstate, able to act outside the framework of decisions by its member governments. It is an instrument for negotiation among, and to some extent for, governments. It is also an instrument for concerting action by governments in support of the Charter. Thus the United Nations can serve, but not substitute itself for, the efforts of its member governments.[1]

In the absence of supranational government, only voluntary agreement can succeed in mitigating international conflicts, and international organization provides an institutionalized means for eliciting such agreement. It provides the principles, the machinery, and the encouragement, but the catalytic agent needed to bring about tangible results is the will to cooperate. When cooperation is forthcoming, great things can be accomplished by international organs and agencies; when it is lacking, they become mere "debating societies." An international organization like the United Nations is as strong as, and no stronger than, its members want it to be.

Judged by the vast scale of UN activities, it appears that most nations have accepted the premise that collective action can be very useful. There can be no certainty, however, that international organization will continue to be accepted merely because collective action is considered useful. Important gains in the past have, with deadly swiftness, been destroyed by a reversion to open conflict. And it is not only war that can weaken or destroy an international organization; the slow but progressive sapping of its strength through stalemate and deadlock over numerous lesser issues can render it ineffectual and meaningless. As with national governments built on the democratic process, the greater danger is not that of making the wrong decision but of failing to make decisions when they are desperately needed. The record of the United Nations over more than forty years calls for a guarded optimism about the future of the process of trying to solve international problems through collective action.

One crucial test for the process of international organization is the prevention of war or, viewed affirmatively, the maintenance of peace and security. This was the *raison d'être* of the United Nations in 1945; it is of central importance today. It corresponds to the fundamental objective of every national government—putting an end to conflict within its own borders.

Until the twentieth century, war was regarded in the Western state system as a major concern only to the states engaged in it. The entire body of neutrality law was

erected on the supposition that other states would remain substantially aloof. With the growth of interdependence in economic and social matters, the concepts of national individuality and isolation slowly began to be supplemented with the idea of community. Modern war in the twentieth century swept away most of the remnants of disinterestedness and aloofness. State after state found itself churned into the maelstrom of World War I, which had begun with a quarrel between Austria-Hungary and Serbia. President Woodrow Wilson recognized the significance of this change when he declared in 1916 that the day of the neutrals was past.[2] Formal acceptance of community responsibility was embodied in the Covenant of the League of Nations, Article 11, which provided that "any war or threat of war, whether immediately affecting any of the Members of the League or not, is hereby declared a matter of concern to the whole League." The UN Charter incorporates this principle in Article 2: "All Members shall give the United Nations every assistance in any action it takes in accordance with the present Charter."

Maintaining peace and security in the world is not the only purpose of international organization, although it is the most crucial. Indeed, the problems with which the United Nations concerns itself include most of those facing states in their foreign relations. These problems range from environmental protection to economic development, from population concerns to outer space. Each year finds the agenda of the General Assembly crowded with problems, new and old, created by the ever-changing international milieu. While many remain unsolved, the members of the United Nations continue to accept the purposes and processes by which solutions are sought through common action.

THE EMERGENCE OF INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

International institutions dating from the early nineteenth century represent a creative response to the need for a joint approach to common problems in such fields as commerce, communication, and transportation. The first examples of modern international organization were the river commissions in Europe. The Central Rhine Commission, for example, was created in 1804 by an agreement between France and Germany that provided for extensive regulation of river traffic, the maintenance of navigation facilities, and the hearing and adjudication of complaints for alleged violations of the Commission's rules. The European Danube Commission was created in 1856 to regulate international traffic on the Danube River. Both river commissions function today much the same as they did when they were first established.

The development of international organization was carried a step farther with the creation of international public unions in the latter half of the nineteenth century. In many cases the public unions were developed as a result of demands placed on national governments by the members of private international associations. Such demands resulted in the establishment of the International Telegraphic Union in 1865 and the Universal Postal Union in 1874. The success of these two unions paved the way for the creation of numerous international public agencies in such diverse fields as narcotic drugs, agriculture, health, weights and measures, railroads, patents and

copyrights, and tariffs. The prolific growth of technical international agencies reflected the new world of science and technology that was compressing space and overcoming political boundaries. States offered collaboration because it was essential to carrying on business and commerce and useful in protecting the lives, health, and other interests of their citizens.

As cooperation among states increased during the nineteenth century, a pattern of organization and procedures developed. Each new international agency established institutional machinery that was unique in some respects, yet possessed certain basic characteristics in common with its contemporaries. The following pattern was typical:

1. Membership was usually limited to sovereign states. Unless regional in scope, such an organization typically held membership open to all states without political conditions.

2. Each organization was created by a multilateral treaty. The treaty served as a constitution that specified the obligations of members, created the institutional structure, and proclaimed the objectives of the organization.

3. A conference or congress was usually established as the basic policy-making organ. The conference included all members of the organization and met infrequently, typically once every five years.

4. Decision making was based on the principle of egalitarianism, with each member having an equal vote and decisions reached by unanimous consent. In time this gave way to majoritarianism, especially in voting on procedural questions.

5. A council or other decision-making organ of an executive nature was often created to implement policies. It usually had a limited membership, and its primary responsibility was to administer the broad policy decisions laid down by the conference.

6. A secretariat was established to carry out the policies of the conference and council and to conduct routine functions of the organization. The secretariat was headed by a secretary-general or director-general, a professional civil servant with an international reputation.

7. Some organizations, such as the river commissions, exercised judicial or quasi-judicial powers. Some created special international courts to decide controversies arising out of their administrative operations.

8. Many organizations were endowed with a legal personality enabling them to own property, to sue and be sued in specified areas, and, in some cases, to enjoy a measure of diplomatic immunity.

9. Financial support was provided by contributions from member governments, using a formula for contributions based on a principle such as "ability to pay," "benefits derived," "equality" or on a combination of such principles.

10. The competence of the organization was usually limited to a functional or specialized problem area, as set forth in its constitution. Organizations of general competence in political, economic, and social areas were not established until the twentieth century.

11. Decision making was carried on in two ways: by drafting international treaties and submitting them to member governments for ratification, and by adopting resolutions recommending action by member governments. A few organizations possessed administrative and minor policy-making powers.

An important by-product of political cooperation on technical matters was the growth of the belief that political cooperation might be equally productive in securing agreement among states in the more weighty matters of war and peace. Such thinking helped prepare the ground for the calling of two conferences at The Hague, Netherlands, in 1899 and 1907, the first general international conferences concerned with building a world system based on law and order. The first Hague Peace Conference was attended by delegates from only twenty-six nations and was largely European in complexion; the second conference, however, moved toward universality, with representatives from forty-four states, including most of the countries of Latin America. The principle of the sovereign equality of states was accepted at the conferences, with the result that the Hague system helped break the monopoly of the great powers of the Concert of Europe in handling matters of war and peace and economic and colonial rivalry. The Hague system also established precedents that contributed to the later development of international parliamentarianism. Headquarters at The Hague provided international machinery to facilitate the pacific settlement of international disputes. The Hague system in effect proclaimed a new era of cooperation and indicated that a global political organization to keep the peace and promote interstate cooperation was now a possibility. The League of Nations and the United Nations were in time to emerge as products of the creative thought produced by the Hague system.

THE LEAGUE EXPERIMENT

Americans were living in an age of innocence when the United States declared war against the Central Powers in 1917. Both sides were then close to exhaustion and had had much of their idealism and fiery nationalism wrung out of them by nearly three years of savage fighting. In the early years of the war, the carnage in Europe produced an American consensus that involvement should be avoided at all costs. But as the war dragged on, that consensus was eroded by a growing belief that the New World somehow had to save the Old World from extinction. If Europeans of all nationalities could live in peace under the American system of democracy, why not apply these same principles to the international community?

Americans entered World War I fired with a holy mission to "make the world safe for democracy." American idealism was summed up in President Woodrow Wilson's peace program, submitted to Congress on January 8, 1918, in which he enunciated Fourteen Points aimed at rekindling Allied idealism and determination and weakening the enemy's resolve by promising a just peace and a new world of security and democracy. In his Fourteenth Point Wilson declared that "a general association of nations must be formed under specific covenants for the purpose of affording