State, Society, and the UN System:

Changing perspectives on multilateralism

Edited by
Keith Krause and
W. Andy Knight

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Introduction

Evolution and change in the United Nations system

Keith Krause and W. Andy Knight

The academic study of the United Nations is enjoying renewed popularity lately, after several years languishing as a backwater within International Relations.[1] Different scholars are studying the scope (and varieties) of multilateralism after the Cold War, the possibilities for reform of the UN system, the domestic sources of state policies towards it, the potential for expansion of the peace and security functions of the United Nations, and so on.[2] Some reasons for this renewed interest are easy to discern. Action in several regional conflicts (peace-keeping, peace-building, observer missions, or good offices) in Somalia, Afghanistan, Namibia, and Cambodia has given renewed legitimacy to the peace and security function of the Security Council and the Secretary-General's Office. The use of Security Council resolutions as the instrument to enforce international law against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait also activated the peace and security mechanisms of the United Nations, as have setbacks in such enforcement in the Yugoslavian successor states. In addition, concern among some Western states about the political tenor of the activities of organizations such as UNESCO and the FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) and concern with the "efficient" use of resources have on occasion threatened the continued existence of these institutions and led to serious efforts at internal reform. Finally, several overarching multilateral issues that had been eclipsed in recent years, such as eco-

nomic development, the environment, or human rights, are ascending the agenda of international attention.

From a broader vantage point, several forces in global politics have altered the basic parameters of the post-1945 world order. The most significant include the end of the Cold War confrontation and the near-disappearance of the Soviet Union/Russia as a superpower, the virtual end of the decolonization process, the emergence of new states, changing patterns of global production and economic activity, and a new emphasis on representative institutions and human rights that challenges the "right" of states to non-interference in their internal affairs. These changes to world politics (and the global distribution of power) will have an impact on the pattern of international governance embodied in the institutions of the United Nations. Whether or not existing institutions will prove adaptable enough to accommodate new demands and challenges is an open question. What is clear, however, is that these institutions will not receive such demands and challenges as "empty vessels." The institutions of the United Nations embody the relationships of power and understandings of "world order" that governed post-1945 international politics, and this institutional expression of world order limits or constrains their future potential.

The central thrust of this book is to examine against this changing backdrop the relationship between particular state/society complexes and the "world order" represented by the institutions of the post-1945 United Nations system. The authors of these studies go beyond a narrow analysis of government-to-government relationships between states and central UN institutions to discuss also the evolving reciprocal links between societies and the multilateral institutions of the post-1945 world. In general the authors make two analytic moves. The first is to highlight the domestic factors and forces that shape a state's policies towards multilateralism. The second is to examine the impact of the multilateral diplomacy of the UN system on domestic political and economic structures and forces, and the broader ideas and structures that shape the context within which state policies are formulated. The goal of each study is to gain a better understanding of not only how states/societies participate in the changing global multilateral system, but how such participation has affected various forms of state and domestic state–society relations, and how the UN system has been influenced by the different pressures for change that have emerged out of its member states.

One forerunner to this book was the effort (sponsored by the Academic Council on the United Nations System) to examine policies towards reform of the UN system through several case-studies, primarily of major powers.[3] The cases in this volume were selected to fill in some gaps and mirror the coverage of this earlier study, and to focus attention on seldom-studied smaller states. Germany and India, for example, have been strong supporters of multilateralism and the UN system, although arguably they have not had a voice commensurate with their relative position of power within world politics. Both (as chapters below point out) have expressed some discontent with existing arrangements and distributions of power and influence within the system. Sweden and Romania have each (in different ways) regarded the UN system as a means for projecting on a wider stage particular domestic understandings of how political life should be organized, and have regarded themselves as "net contributors" to the UN system. Smaller states such as Chile, Jamaica, and Sierra Leone have been on the receiving end of the benefits and costs that have accrued from membership and participation in the multilateral system. The theoretical and practical implications of the perspectives articulated by these states, while not dominant, must be included in any comprehensive evaluation of the future directions for multilateralism in the UN system.

This study also departs from previous work and attempts to overcome some of the methodological and conceptual limitations of earlier approaches, limitations that stem from its statist and pluralist orientations. It also draws out from the cases a framework that can guide further studies on the UN system. Since this book is part of a larger project (sponsored by the United Nations University) exploring different facets of "Multilateralism and the United Nations System," it is embedded within, and draws upon, the approaches developed within that project.[4] The meaning and potential of "multilateralism" have come under recent scholarly scrutiny, and many different definitions of it have been offered.[5] Most simply, multilateralism can be regarded as "an institutional form that coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct."[6] But, as noted by Robert Cox: "to define a meaning of multilateralism ... we must begin with an assessment of the present and emerging future condition of the world system, with the power relationships that will give contextual meaning to the term."[7] To comprehend the forces that aid or hinder multilateral

activity, one needs to understand the process of structural change within states/societies, in multilateral institutions themselves, and at the level of world order.

The "state/society perspective" and state policies towards the United Nations system

The particular contribution of this volume is to focus attention on the forces at work within and between states, through the lens of what can be called a "state/society perspective." Such an approach starts from the premise that traditional approaches to the study of international organization do not capture the many ways in which states approach their participation in multilateral relations or the many factors that influence state policy, and that their failure to do so has theoretical and practical consequences. Among the processes or forces that this approach highlights are such things as historical influences, the configuration of state power and civil society, or the role of individuals. More will be said about this below, but one general implication of this approach is that scholars must examine not only what occurs within international and domestic political "space" (while keeping the two spheres separate) but what occurs *across* the domestic–international divide. This boundary must be to some extent erased, in order to examine forces and factors that work across it. Multilateral participation, as expressed within the United Nations system, provides an excellent issue area in which to examine this interplay of domestic social and political forces with broader currents in world politics.

This can be contrasted with most theoretical explications of foreign policy and state behaviour, which have attempted to build general models from the experience of one or two (usually Western) states.[8] These models perhaps do not even explain foreign policy formation in their primary case, but they are almost always inadequate when applied to different contexts. What unites the contributions to this volume is that most authors have tried to use methods appropriate to their case and have, where appropriate and necessary, gone beyond existing approaches to the study of the formation of state policy towards the United Nations. The broader conceptual umbrella for this can be called a "state/society perspective," and it serves to highlight a broader set of political struggles beneath the state (within society) and between society and the state.

In general, a state/society perspective adopts a more comprehen-

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sive approach to analysing foreign policy-making concerning multilateral organizations and the UN system, and is more "sociological" in its conception of the state and its role in international and domestic politics. It draws attention to the interactive struggles between the society and the state apparatus and "consider[s] the 'state' not as a single entity with a single interest, but rather as a 'naturally' divided entity, made up of particular relationships" that can cut across state boundaries.[9] This approach differs from realist or "world system structuralist" approaches, in that the domestic political context is not considered irrelevant to theory-building or purely determined by systemic processes.[10]

It also differs from functionalist or liberal institutionalist approaches, which adopt a pluralist account of state–society relations in which the state is conceived of as an "honest broker" that aggregates the competing interests articulated by different groups in society (whose interests are exogenously determined).[11] Rather, it insists that "the state cannot be isolated from civil society: it is defined by the series of links that form both the state and the societal groups."[12] Groups within the state (such as the military in Chile) or within the society (such as labour unions in Jamaica) not only can exert greater influence on state policy than other groups; at various times they can actually shape the process by which interests are articulated and aggregated, to the benefit of some groups and detriment of others. Thus, while some foreign policy orientations towards multilateral institutions may reflect the diversity of interests expressed within a state/society complex, others may reflect the state apparatus having been captured by a particular group within society. Hence the degree to which state representatives can pursue policies within international organizations that run against the interests of various groups within society is an issue that has to be addressed in each particular case. Some authors have argued that a state's insertion into the United Nations system and its activities in the multilateral arena actually increase the autonomy of state rulers, making them less responsive to (and less representative of) their societies. One example of this is the way in which economic policy planners in states such as India attempt to advance their ideas via the World Bank or International Monetary Fund (IMF) when they have been thwarted within the Indian bureaucracy; another would be the ability of the ruling élite of a "predatory state" such as Sierra Leone to buttress its position and extract resources from society.

At the meta-theoretical level, this approach bears some resem-

blance to a "social constructivist" orientation, which argues that the dynamic processes operating at the level of the international system simultaneously and mutually constitute state actors and the systemic structures within which they act.[13] It also fits alongside what some authors call "neo-structuralist" approaches, which take as their subject matter "an overall transformative process wherein all states and societal forces are constantly being transformed through participation in the world system as a whole in terms of their fundamental characteristics and structure."[14] Factors analysed by realists, liberal institutionalists, or world system theorists do not disappear from this account, and indeed some contributions to this volume come close to operating within these perspectives. But this is used as a point of departure to push the overall analysis beyond government-to-government relationships between the state and central institutions of the UN system. The goal is not so much to create a "new" theory of state/society participation in the UN system, as to add to the array of approaches scholars can use to apprehend the subject matter.

The "state/society perspective" and the United Nations system

A different account of the processes of change unfolding at the level of the UN system itself is a crucial aspect of a state/society approach, and a necessary counterpoint to the specific dynamics presented in the case-studies. Thus the remainder of this introduction discusses changes in the UN system and in the overarching conceptions of "world order," and attempts to situate the individual chapters against a broad backdrop of evolution in the multilateral institutions of the UN system. One caveat must be registered, however: the loose equation of "multilateralism" with activities within the UN system is clearly an oversimplification.[15] A focus on the UN system (broadly conceived) excludes much multilateral activity, but it does at least delimit the scope of the following analyses, and brings somewhat greater theoretical attention to bear on the generally institutionally focused analysis of the United Nations. It does not imply, however, that all activities within the UN system are multilateral, or that the proper focus of attention ought solely to be the operations of UN organs.

Most accounts of the UN system treat it as a complex bureaucratic structure organized with a hierarchical division of labour. On the surface, this is obvious: the United Nations has principal organs, main committees, standing committees, subsidiary organs, special-

ized agencies, and semi-autonomous bodies (like the IMF, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development [IBRD], the International Development Association [IDA], and the International Atomic Energy Agency [IAEA]) scattered around the globe, supported by the Secretariat, and reporting to the Secretary-General. As an intergovernmental structure, the UN system also recognizes and draws upon non-governmental organizations, and has been functionally designed to achieve certain objectives of the international community, codified in the Charter. These objectives include maintaining international peace and security, advocating protection of fundamental human rights, ensuring the sovereign equality of nation-states, and facilitating socio-economic progress and advancement. This large, complex, and fairly permanent social system has been characterized as a "superbureaucracy" or a "new Byzantium," and envisioned in mechanical terms as a complex machinery of international governance.[16]

But there is another way of looking at the United Nations system: as the concrete expression of the power relationships of post-1945 international society, and as the arena in which competing ideologies and values have clashed. Such a "sociological" orientation at the systemic level mirrors and complements the "state/society perspective" adopted for examining domestic political change, and is one way to escape the "dissatisfaction with the individualist foundations of neo-realist international relations theory, foundations which encourage an understanding of international cooperation and institutions as collective results of the self-interested strategic interaction of states."[17] It also resonates with certain approaches to the study of international organization, particularly with those scholars who have proposed that sociological concepts and methods for the study of domestic societies be applied to the study of "international society" or drawn parallels between the devices for maintaining order in the anarchical societies of so-called "primitive" peoples and those that supply a modicum of order in the modern states system, in the absence of an international government.[18] Key analytical concepts used in sociology (legitimacy, authority, influence, status, socialization, stratification, social control, norms, rules, belief systems) have also found their way into the international relations literature that deals with the mechanisms and means of international governance.

Hence the UN system encompasses the institutions noted above, but is also the expression of a particular "world order," understood as the "political, economic, social, ideological, and cultural structures

that define the behaviour and power relationships among human groups."[19] These historically determined structures are "those persisting patterns of thought and actions that define the frameworks within which people and states act."[20] The United Nations system is the post-1945 incarnation of these structures of world order, and its possible evolutionary trajectories are constrained and channelled by them. This perspective allows one to move beyond a state-centric focus, in the same way that an account of the competing forces at work in domestic politics moves beyond institutionalist/statist political science.

Discussions of possible reforms to, or evolution of, the institutions of the UN system must be examined against the way in which the structures that underpin them have (or have not) changed. This does not, however, mean that the UN system is nothing more than a transparent forum through which is refracted the interplay of power relations between states. As Inis Claude noted:

Political institutions evolve, not along lines rigidly set by their creators and definitively stated in constitutional documents, but in response to a dynamic process that combines the propulsive and directive impulses of trends running through the political context and of purposes injected by participants in their operations.[21]

The objectives of the founders, and the constitution of the organization, act as constraints on the United Nations, and its institutions continue to embody the power relations that dominated at their founding. Ultimately, however, these structures do not control altogether its evolution, and the UN system has developed over time a degree of relative autonomy, with different parts of it possessing an underlying *Weltanschauung* that affects the kinds of pressures it responds to and the kinds of policies that emerge from it.

Principles and ideas embodied in the UN system at its creation

In historical terms, the UN system can be compared to the League of Nations and Concert of Europe systems, both of which possessed some institutional expression and incorporated particular visions of world order. The Concert of Europe established a loose procedure of great power governance of European politics that permitted the interests of smaller powers (such as Poland) to be sacrificed in order to safeguard its central principle of the "balance of power." Its focus was almost exclusively on political/security issues. The League of

Nations system was a set of weak institutions whose paralysis was the product of changing power relationships in which the declining powers (Britain, France) were unable to create the consensus needed to empower multilateral institutions to address problems of international peace and security, while the ascendant powers (the United States, the Soviet Union) were unwilling or unable to play a greater role in multilateral arrangements for domestic, historical, and ideological reasons. However, a range of functional institutions (concerning communications, health, labour, and so on) broadened the agenda of multilateralism beyond its previous political/security focus, and new ideological norms (the concepts of self-determination, or "one state – one vote") were introduced into the discourse.

A historical account of the evolution of the UN system would be superfluous.[22] From the perspective of this project, however, it is important to note that the political, economic, social, ideological, and cultural structures of the post-1945 world were embedded in the UN system as constitutive principles and as underlying ideas. Constitutive principles in world politics (the "rules" that determine the nature of social relations without determining outcomes) include the sovereign state as the subject of international law, concepts of non-intervention, and the principle of self-help.[23] The underlying ideas included the legitimacy of great power governance on peace and security matters, the validity of resort to war as an ultimate arbiter, an essentially "liberal individualist" conception of human rights (including the right to property, the free flow of information, and other negative rights), and a capitalist global economy based on comparative advantage and an international division of labour. All of these underlying ideas have been challenged in various institutions of the UN system, and in some cases the institutional expression of these ideas has evolved through a process of adaptation (such as the innovation of peace-keeping), or the struggle has crippled the effectiveness of the institutions embodying them (the battle over UNESCO being a case in point). Seldom, however, have the constitutive principles of world politics themselves been challenged.

Concrete expressions of these political, economic, social, ideological, and cultural structures are not difficult to find. Within the core of the UN system, the structure and powers of the Security Council are rooted in the acceptance of the legitimacy of great power governance; this gave rise to the veto of the five permanent members, and to the relatively unrestricted scope of Security Council powers.[24] This was different from the veto that every state possessed in the League of

Nations system, but it matched well the post-1945 configuration of power. It was also clear that the main concern of the Security Council would be with threats to international peace and security, as one goal of the institution was to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. But the increasing gap between the 1945 configuration of power and the realities of global politics in the 1990s gave rise to demands for institutional reform. These have ranged from proposals to alter the membership of the Security Council (by giving permanent member status to Germany and Japan, adding permanent members from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, or creating "semipermanent" members), to changing the method of electing the Secretary-General, to altering the procedures for collective UN action (by bypassing the veto).[25]

In other cases the underlying ideas of post-1945 world order have been embodied within the formal and informal institutional practices. For example, UNESCO incorporated into its founding ethic the principle of the "free flow of information," based on the principle that news was neutral and objective, and a commodity that should be traded in a fashion analogous to the economic principle of comparative advantage. In its early years, UNESCO even had a Division of the Free Flow of Communication, and policies protecting infant national news agencies (such as in India and China) were frowned upon.[26] The counter-reaction to this, incarnated in the call for a New World Information Order, was based on a perception that the penetration of the South by Western media sources posed a profound challenge to national self-expression and cultural integrity.[27] A similar observation can be made with respect to the ideology underpinning the division between the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights.

Other scholars have made parallel arguments with respect to the economic ideology of "embedded liberalism" that governed the institutionalization and administrative norms of post-1945 international economic institutions such as the World Bank or International Monetary Fund, or to the "New Deal regulatory state" that informed American planning for post-war multilateral arrangements.[28] The Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) was a subsidiary body in the global economic regime, and even the institutional innovations of the UN Development Programme (UNDP) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) failed to dent the dominance of the institutions controlled by the developed states. The

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