The United Nations System:

The policies of member states

Edited by
Chadwick F. Alger, Gene M. Lyons, and John E. Trent

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Preface

This volume of essays has been a number of years in the making. The project originated in discussions in the secretariat of the International Political Science Association (IPSA) in the mid-1980s about ongoing controversies over the role of the United Nations that threatened to weaken the system of international cooperation constructed after World War II. There were strong calls for reforming the UN system and it was thought that the international social science community might make a scholarly contribution to the reform movement by mobilizing an international research team to examine the crisis in multilateralism.

The IPSA initiative was joined by the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), the International Studies Association (ISA), and the newly formed Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS), and exploratory sessions were held at the IPSA world congress in Washington, D.C., in 1988 and at the ISA annual convention, organized in cooperation with the British International Studies Association (BISA) in London in 1989.

It was agreed during those meetings that a series of studies of national policies on the UN system should be commissioned. More than 30 years had passed since the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace had sponsored a similar comparative study of national policies on the United Nations. While there were some such studies available

since then, they were scattered and generally lacked comparison. A comparative study would not only make a positive contribution to the literature in the international organization field but also, it was hoped, stimulate continuing research on the issue.

When undertaking the eight studies of state policies in the UN system that appear in this volume, authors were asked to cover five main topics. First, a general review of the historic position of the state on international organizations and the expectations of the country about the role of the United Nations. Second, an analysis of the main UN issues in which the government has had a special interest. Third, the impact of societal factors (e.g. public opinion and interest groups) on UN policies. Fourth, how the state actually participates in international organizations (e.g. governmental organization at home and in UN missions, delegate selection, and consultation with regional groups). Fifth, the position of the state on proposals for UN reform.

With support from the Ford Foundation and the former Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security, a series of draft studies were presented at a conference held in Ottawa, Canada, in early 1990. The eight national studies in this volume were originally discussed at the Ottawa meeting and were revised in late 1993 to take into account the dramatic changes in the United Nations – and in international relations, more generally – that have come about with the end of the Cold War.

At the same time, a second series of national UN studies were prepared in connection with a broad-ranging project on multilateralism (MUNS, Multilateralism and the United Nations System) sponsored by the United Nations University (UNU). The second series, like this volume, has just been published by the UNU Press under the title *State, Society, and the UN System: Changing Perspectives on Multilateralism* (ed. Keith Krause and W. Andy Knight). Together the two volumes provide a significant body of research and a base for continuing investigation as scholars and statesmen prepare to re-examine the role of the United Nations in 1995, 50 years after the signing of the UN Charter.

Transnational research cooperation can be as arduous as it is imperative. We are grateful for the perseverance and patience of the authors of the eight national studies in this book. We were faced not only with the problems of communicating over far distances but also with trying to keep up with fast-moving events in the early 1990s. Like any scholarly enterprise, we were more interested in long-term persistent trends than in current affairs. But the events that followed

the end of the Cold War have so fundamentally changed the arena of international affairs that they could not be ignored as they took shape.

Change continues, as it always does – and will. But, by the end of 1993, it was none the less possible to identify some of the main transformations that were taking place. It was time to make these studies available to a broader scholarly community and we are thankful that the UNU Press agreed to publication at a time when the 50th anniversary of the United Nations leads to serious reflection on the future of international organizations.

We also want to thank the Ford Foundation and the former Canadian Institute for International Peace and Security for their support of the Ottawa conference, our universities for the facilities that they have made available to us – the Ohio State University, Dartmouth College, and the University of Ottawa – and the colleagues who participated in the Ottawa conference. In the end, of course, each of the authors remains responsible for her/his work even while we have all shared in this common enterprise.

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The United Nations in historical perspective

Chadwick F. Alger

The purpose of this introductory essay is to provide the long view – a historical perspective against which to examine the studies of national policies on the United Nations that constitute the major part of this book. The country studies describe the policies that individual member states have followed in the United Nations over the years and the ways in which these policies have been shaped by domestic politics as well as developments in international relations. They reveal areas of convergence and divergence among member states and give us a basis for understanding the opportunities and problems in strengthening the capacity of the United Nations to enhance multilateral co-operation at a time of fundamental change in the inter-state system. But any assessment of the United Nations requires a longer and wider frame of reference to be meaningful. First, the present United Nations must be approached from a historical perspective. From the vantage point of 1994, for example, the League of Nations was founded only 74 years ago, on 10 January 1920, and the United Nations only 49 years ago, on 24 October 1945. Most of what we know about multilateral cooperation for solving common problems has come out of relatively brief experience in these two great laboratories, where we have learned from our failures as well as from our successes. Second, thinking about the role of the United Nations in the future requires a UN system perspective, including all of the or-

ganizations of the UN system – and, indeed, going beyond to regional and other limited membership organizations that are part of the total network of international institutions through which states cooperate.

The United Nations in historical perspective

The stage on which the drafters of the UN Charter performed was built during a long historical process through which human inquisitiveness, restlessness, and acquisitiveness produced ever-increasing contacts among human settlements, across ever-longer distances. The results of this historical process presented opportunities at the San Francisco Conference that had evolved out of growing experience in peaceful cooperation among peoples. But there were also constraints produced by tendencies toward wars of increasing geographic scope with weapons of rapidly increasing destructive power.

If we look back in time from San Francisco, we readily see that the United Nations is a child of the League of Nations. It incorporates important institutional developments of the League, such as an international secretariat and the growth in importance of economic and social activities during the relatively brief history of the League. The United Nations Charter also reflects efforts to gain from League failures, as in procedures for deployment of military forces by the Security Council in response to aggression. While the requirement that no permanent member of the Security Council vote against such deployment has, until recently at least, been an overwhelming restraint on the use of this power, nevertheless the unanimity required in the League was more stringent than the 9 votes out of 15 required in the United Nations.

The League too was not wholly a product of its founding conference, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Inis L. Claude considers the century bounded by the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the outbreak of World War I (1914) as the "era of preparation for international organization."[1] He discerns three prime sources of the League of Nations. First, the League Council evolved out of the Concert of Europe created by the Congress of Vienna, convoked to create a new Europe out of the ruins of the Napoleonic Wars. Through the Concert of Europe the great powers made themselves the self-appointed guardians of the European system of states. The Concert of Europe met sporadically, some 30 times, before World War I to deal with pressing political issues. While smaller states were sometimes present at Concert meetings, the Concert was dominated by

the powerful. The League Covenant provided for a Council with explicit authority, with the continuity of regular meetings and with membership of both large and small states.

Second, the League also evolved out of the Hague System, instituted by conferences in 1899 and 1907. The League borrowed extensively from procedures for the peaceful settlement of conflicts codified by the Hague System. And the League reflected the Hague System's response to growing demands for universality, i.e. that all states take part in international conferences. In the words of the president of the 1907 Hague Conference, "This is the first time that the representatives of all constituted States have been gathered together to discuss interests which they have in common and which contemplate the good of mankind."[2] The notion of universality meant not only the inclusion of smaller states but also participation by states outside Europe.

Third, the League also evolved out of international bodies founded in the nineteenth century, often referred to as public international unions, to deal with common problems that transcend national boundaries. These include the Rhine Commission, established by the Congress of Vienna in 1815, and the Danube Commission, established in 1848. Other examples are the International Telegraphic Union (1865), the Universal Postal Union (1874), and similar organizations dealing with health, agriculture, tariffs, railroads, standards of weight and measurement, patents and copyrights, narcotic drugs, and prison conditions. Through these organizations states acknowledged that problems were emerging that required periodic conferences where collaborative decisions would be made, to be implemented by secretariats on a day-to-day basis. The League borrowed extensively from this practice.

If we probe deeper into the past we find, of course, that the forces that fostered the antecedents of the League also had more distant beginnings. It is important to take note of these because we sometimes forget them when we emphasize more recent forms of "interdependence." The industrial revolution in the eighteenth century dramatically changed the technology of transportation, communication, and manufacturing. This in turn fostered the need for international organizations to deal with problems created by more rapid transportation and communication and by growth in international marketing, in importing of raw materials, and in the international interdependence of labour.

Some might say that humanity was placed on an irreversible path

toward the League and the United Nations even earlier, in the late fifteenth century, when Europeans began a pattern of worldwide exploration that eventually led to extensive empires in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and to Western domination of the world. William McNeill dates the "closure of global ecumene" as 1500–1650. The result was to link the Atlantic face of Europe with the shores of most of the earth. "What had always before been the extreme fringe of Eurasia became, within little more than a generation, a focus of the world's sea lanes, influencing and being influenced by every human society within easy reach of the sea."[3] European-based empires eventually led to the creation of a worldwide system of states. In its early years the United Nations was deeply involved in the creation of independent states out of former colonial empires. Much present activity in the United Nations is concerned with the efforts of these new states to transcend their economic dependence on the West. In a fundamental sense the conditions that fomented demands for a New International Economic Order in the 1970s, and for a New World Information and Communications Order in the 1980s, have their roots in the "closure of global ecumene" in 1500–1650.

Of course, the creators of "global ecumene" were not the first builders of empires; they were preceded by the Roman, Greek, Persian, Mongol, Inca, Han, and many others. And the "global ecumene" was preceded by the closure of the "Eurasian ecumene" in the "first century (or perhaps earlier), [when] the consolidation of a Kushan empire forged a link between Parthia and China, completing a chain of civilized empires that extended all across Eurasia, from the Atlantic to the Pacific."[4] Across this vast ecumene McNeill describes exchange in art and religion, migration of useful plants and animals, the spread of disease, some technological exchange, and trade. For example, "cotton, sugar cane and chickens, all first domesticated in India, spread to both China and Western Eurasia during this period, while China contributed apricots and peaches, perhaps also citrus fruits, cherries, and almonds to Western Eurasia. In exchange, the Chinese imported alfalfa and a number of vegetable crops, as well as the Iranian great horses."

Thus we see that humankind has long had tendencies to travel, migrate, exchange, borrow, and dominate, and to invent ever new technologies to broaden the geographic scope of these activities. This has produced a growing number of international organizations, some 286 international governmental organizations (IGOs) and 4,696 international non-governmental (non-profit) organizations (INGOs) by

1992.[5] At least 34 of the IGOs and 426 of the INGOs are global in scope. The autonomous organizations that comprise the United Nations system alone account for 18 of the global IGOs. Although the UN system was not a necessary descendant of the "first ecumene," it can be viewed as a natural outcome of human tendencies to extend contacts and activities to the greatest distance possible, thus creating the need for permanent international organizations that facilitate co-operation and problem-solving.

In developing a historical perspective, it is worth remembering Claude's depiction of the century between 1815 and 1914 as the "era of *preparation* for international organization." How should we characterize the period between the founding of the League of Nations (1920) and 1990? Very apt would be the "era of *preparation* for global governance." What have the pioneers in this first era of global organizations left as their heritage?
- they have achieved universality;
- they have created a network of global organizations responsive to a growing agenda of global problems;
- they have established a continuous, worldwide presence of this system of organizations, in some 134 cities in all continents;
- they have made multilateral decision-making commonplace and have developed new procedures for achieving consensus;
- they have greatly increased the number of tools available for peace-building;
- they have identified and have made substantial progress in multi-lateral definition of a set of fundamental global values, such as peace, human rights, development, and ecological balance;
- they have made some progress in breaking down barriers between the people of the world and global governmental organizations;
- they have made limited progress in linking scholars to the UN system.

Imagine, if you will, how surprised the founders of the League, or the United Nations, would be to learn what has emerged from their initiatives. Imagine, too, how much easier their task would have been had they been able to approach the future with these achievements already in place. This imagination will set the stage on which we will now consider each element in the heritage that we have received from the "era of *preparation* for global governance." The "era of competent global governance" is still in the future, but we have come much further than most people realize. The greatest danger we face in the near future is that we may become so incapacitated

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by dwelling on how far we have to go that we will fail to move forward on the solid stepping stones that have been laid by those who have gone before.

The achievement of universality

The universality of United Nations membership now seems so ordinary that its significance is often overlooked. At its founding the League had only 29 members, including 10 from Europe, 10 from Latin America, and only 9 from all the rest of the world.[6] The hope of League founders that League membership would be universal was never realized. Although 63 states were eventually members of the League, there were never more than 58 members at one time.[7] The United Nations has grown from 51 members to 184 members since its founding. The only state that has not ratified the UN Charter, other than a handful of very small ones that choose to remain outside, is Switzerland. Nevertheless, Switzerland is a member of many agencies of the UN system.

In achieving universality the United Nations first overcame the earlier exclusion of states that opposed the United Nations coalition in World War II. Later it admitted many states that were carved out of former colonial empires in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and Oceania. Not only were these new states admitted to the United Nations simultaneously with the acquisition of independence, but the United Nations played a significant role in their relatively peaceful independence process. Even before independence, future leaders of new states, such as Julius Nyerere, testified before the Fourth Committee of the UN General Assembly and spent many months politicking for independence in the lounges and corridors of UN Headquarters. Still later the United Nations quickly accepted the membership of states created out of the former Soviet Union and several former Yugoslav republics.

Now that virtual universal membership of states has been achieved, there is a tendency of some to emphasize its drawbacks, particularly the fact that all states, despite great disparities in size, have one vote in UN bodies. These disparities are very great. UN members range in population from China, with 1 billion people, to over 30 members with under 1 million people. They range in per capita GNP from those with a few hundred US$ to some with over US$20,000. They range from the worldwide reach of missiles, ships, and aircraft of the United States and Russia to numerous states with little more than

local police forces. On the other hand, despite the fact that all states have one vote, there are countervailing factors: China, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Russia have a veto in the Security Council; the wealthy benefit from weighted voting in the World Bank and the IMF; and consensual voting procedures have become more frequent, recognizing that majorities that do not take into account the wishes of the wealthy and militarily powerful may not be able to implement their decisions. Also, it cannot be denied that states with military and financial power use their influence to win the votes of others. Moreover, countries with great wealth and many trained people have far greater capacity to represent their interests in UN politics through the assignment of large numbers of people to UN bodies.

Whatever the difficulties of universality under conditions of one vote for each state, general acceptance that all states have a right to sit at the conference tables of humankind is a significant achievement for the United Nations. Those who worked for universality in the late nineteenth century would be stunned were they to wander into the UN General Assembly (or the plenary of any UN agency) and see an Assembly of 184 members. The same would be true of founders of the League and the United Nations. If we very arbitrarily assign these states to five customary regions, there are now 53 from Africa, 42 from Asia, 44 from Europe, 35 from the Americas, and 10 from Oceania. Of course, elements of the old Concert notion of rule by the powerful still remain – in the Security Council, in superpower negotiations outside the United Nations, and in a variety of economic and financial bodies within and outside the United Nations. Nevertheless, significant progress toward universal participation has been made.

Appreciation of the significance of universality is enhanced by recognizing that only a few states have embassies in virtually all other states. Most states have embassies only in the big states, in states in their region, and in a few others. It is common practice for a single embassy to be accredited to a number of states. Thus the achievement of UN universality has had a fundamental impact on possibilities for bilateral, as well as multilateral, contact. And it is an indispensable prerequisite for global problem-solving. States that would erode the principle of universality, either by withdrawing from UN organizations or by denying membership to others, are threatening one of the most precious achievements over the last 74 years. The opportunity for all states to speak to all others, and the obligation of