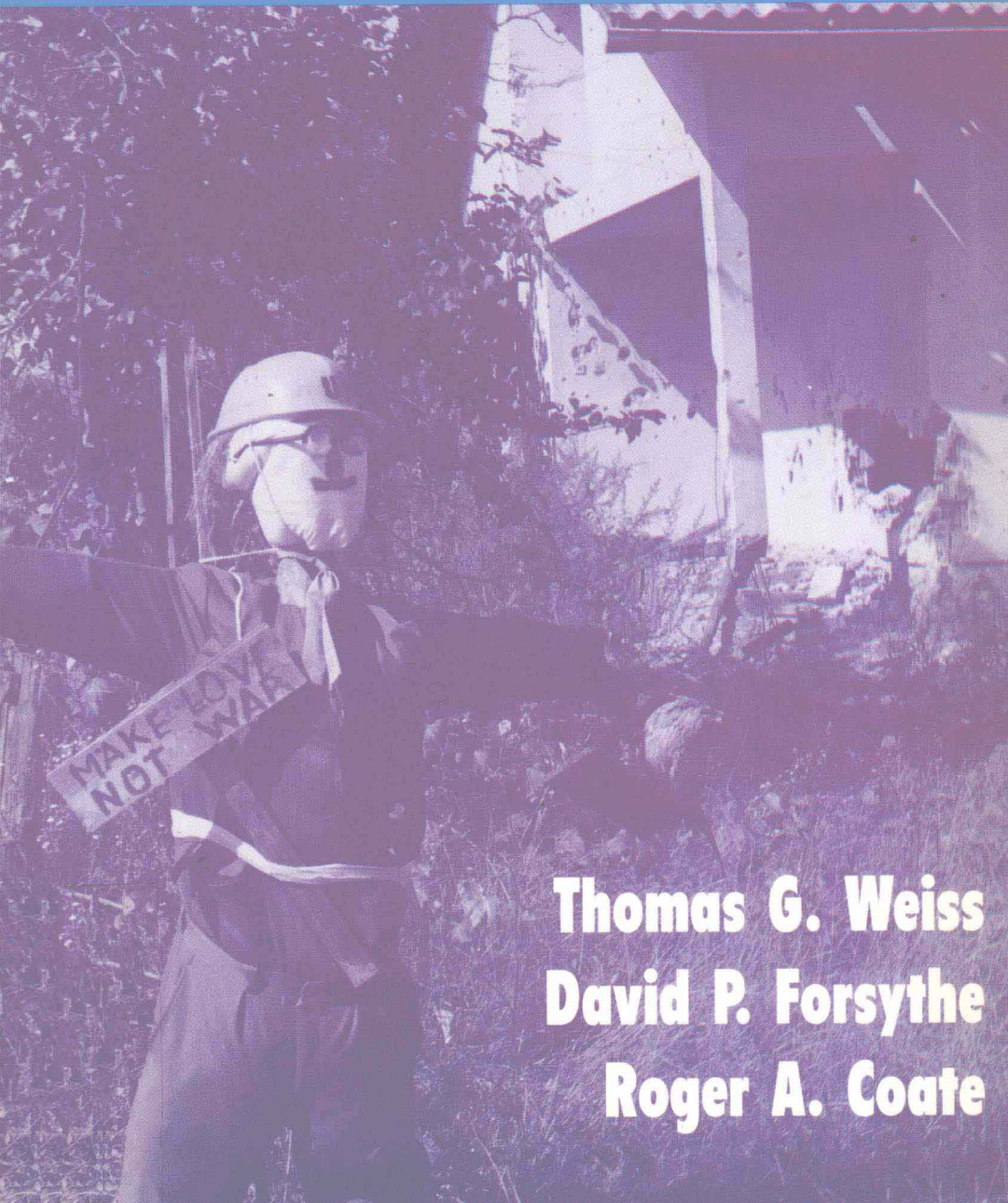


The United Nations and Changing World Politics



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The United Nations and Changing World Politics

Preface

The United Nations (UN) has survived since 1945, or twice as long as the League of Nations. Moreover, it has enjoyed a remarkable renaissance since the end of the Cold War. It is time to take a fresh look at the first half-century of this intergovernmental organization (IGO).

We have endeavored first and foremost to capture the essence of the United Nations as a political organization caught in the struggle to make public policy through the exercise of power. We stress how representatives of member states and other actors seek to use UN symbols and procedures to shape policy. State actors do not approach the UN only or even primarily in terms of peace and justice. They may give some attention to these abstract values, but they are primarily driven by their own values, needs, and interests. Indeed, a classic study of the UN and the great powers concludes that conceptions of immediate interests, not long-term and abstract concerns for peace and justice, have been the most important factor in shaping UN activities.¹

Policymaking always involves power, understood as a synonym for influence. We also observe how UN structure and processes constrain the exercise of power. Hard power is coercion through manipulation of economic resources and through military force. Soft power is persuasion and pressure through words and symbolic acts. The central question for those interested in the United Nations is, Who seeks what policy objective, using what power, and with what outcome? What occurs at the UN, to paraphrase Harold Lasswell, is about who governs across national boundaries and who gets what, when, how.²

Yet this approach to UN politics is misleading in one important way because the United Nations is about international governance without government, or about how transnational problems can be managed by public authorities in the absence of the “normal” attributes of government. These include a true legislature, a single executive branch, an integrated court system, and, above all, a legitimate monopoly on the exercise of force. Our primary objective is to get students to understand the UN as part of the fabric of world politics.

We also wanted to capture the essence of public international law as an institution that exerts real influence on real political struggles. We emphasize that, like all public law, international law is not a technical subject independent of politics but rather part and parcel of world politics. International law is formulated through a political process, frequently centering on the United Nations. Consequently, international law interacts with world politics, sometimes shaping it greatly and sometimes only slightly or not at all.

Whatever its ultimate impact on a given policy or situation, international law is always present in UN proceedings. Indeed, the world organization is a construction of international law because the UN Charter is a multilateral treaty. The ever-present, often subtle, influence of international law is perhaps better understood by those who practice politics at the UN than by many academics observing the process from the outside. We want readers to understand how international law interacts with “pure” politics; how attention to international legal rules (reflecting formalized policy) interacts with subsequent considerations of policy and power.

Moreover, we want to stress the importance of history. The present and even the future have a history. When seemingly new issues arise, there is almost always a background to the issue that affects its management or disposition. Rather than providing a *tabula rasa* or constituting the “end of history,”³ a phrase that was popular for a very brief moment, the end of the Cold War has permitted the brutal expression of historical grievances. So when the Security Council or General Assembly deals with an apparently new issue such as violence in the Balkans or humanitarian assistance in Somalia or how to pursue economic growth while protecting the environment in Brazil, the history of these issues exerts a pull. History does not necessarily determine the future, but history affects the future. The history of such issues as using force, coordinating assistance, or promoting sustainable development affects new policy decisions. We want readers to know the political and legal history of the UN so that present and future choices can be analyzed and debated against that background.

Writing in the mid-1990s, we are deeply affected by the notion of change. We ourselves began our studies of world events when the United Nations was in the headlines and on the front pages of even local newspapers. UN officials were managing more than 20,000 troops in the old Belgian Congo (now Zaire) in the 1960s. Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld died while coping with that crisis, which almost caused the collapse of the world organization. UN diplomatic and military personnel have been deeply involved in Middle Eastern politics, since the late 1940s in Palestine but especially in the 1956 Suez crisis and the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

We then watched as governments placed the United Nations on a back burner. For much of the 1970s and even more so in the 1980s, major states seemed to bypass the UN much of the time. Some developing countries continued to look upon the world organization as central to world politics, but both Washington and Moscow seemed to favor action outside of the UN. Washington circles of opinion, both public and private, were particularly harsh in their criticisms of the UN in the 1980s. The first Reagan administration, and related think tanks like the Heritage Foundation, manifested a deep distrust of multilateral diplomacy. One Reagan official assigned to the UN spoke publicly of “waving ... a fond farewell as [the UN] sailed into the sunset.” Several U.S. allies also shied away from an organization whose “automatic” voting majorities, that is, voting groups that seemed to be unthinkingly predictable, had shifted over the decades from being con-

trolled by the United States to being dominated by developing states. Even some developing states seemed at times to despair of an organization whose resolutions were not followed by commitment to action.

Then we watched again as a marked change came over the organization in the wake of the collapse of communism during 1985–1991. Mikhail Gorbachev, then the first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, called upon the UN in a September 1987 article in *Pravda* to play a more central role in world politics. The Reagan administration, the most unilateralist in modern American political history, responded cautiously. Nonetheless, by the end of the Bush administration, the United States used the UN to a great extent in dealing with such major issues as the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, although earlier it had bypassed the UN on other matters such as the invasion of Panama in 1989. By the mid-1990s the UN was back again on the front pages and in the headlines—and on CNN as well!

The notion of change has long bedeviled social scientists. We have found it easier to chart the past than to understand the full implications of current issues, or where policy decisions on those issues may take us in the future. Nevertheless, we want to try to say as much as we can about change in world politics and what this might mean for the future of the United Nations. We do not pretend to possess privileged knowledge of the future, but we do want to encourage and guide readers to look at several ways of understanding the political changes that drive events in the UN system.

We have endeavored to design this book so that it can be used in at least two ways. First, we want it to serve as a core text in college courses on international organization and the United Nations. Second, we want it to be useful as supplemental reading in other courses, such as international relations and international law. Thus we have sought to present the essentials of politics at the UN in three central arenas: security, human rights, and sustainable development.

We selected these areas not only because of their intrinsic importance in world politics but also because the United Nations has had significant normative and operational impacts in all three of them. But we have not tried to write everything we know about the UN. For example, we have not discussed disarmament under security because the UN has had virtually no operational responsibilities in the area, and such a discussion would dilute the emphasis on the concrete illustrations of significant military activities over the past half-century. We want to keep the work short enough to be used as supplemental information in a variety of courses.

Each of us drafted a section of the book. Tom Weiss wrote the first draft on peace and security issues; Dave Forsythe did the same for the part on human rights and humanitarian affairs; and Roger Coate drafted the section on sustainable development. Each of us then rewrote all sections so that pride of authorship could yield to collective judgment. This holds true for the introduction and conclusion as well. Our collaboration has, we hope, not only discouraged ill-in-

formed and parochial points of view but produced a synergy and a better text than any one of us could have written on our own. Each of us had conducted original research and taught about the three crucial areas of UN activity that provide the central framework for this book: international peace and security, human rights and humanitarian law, and sustainable development. We have also spent considerable time working within, or consulting with, international organizations.

Four outside reviewers read the manuscript. Craig Murphy of Wellesley College and Lawrence Finkelstein of Northern Illinois University, both recognized scholars of international organization and world politics, provided comments through the cooperation of the International Organization Section of the International Studies Association. We are grateful to the section for these two readers, whose critiques greatly affected subsequent revisions. Two other readers, unknown to us, were provided by Westview Press, and their critiques also guided our revisions. A discussion group focused on this manuscript at the annual meeting of the Academic Council on the United Nations System (ACUNS) held in Montreal during June 1993. The prepress manuscript was finalized by the staff of the Watson Institute at Brown University, working under a grant from ACUNS. Thus this book is in some ways a product of the International Studies Association and ACUNS, although only the authors are responsible for the final version. We acknowledge with gratitude the time and effort that others put into improving our work.

We would like to express our special gratitude to those staff members of the Watson Institute who—with good humor and professionalism—retyped, edited, and helped shape various versions of this manuscript. Special thanks are in order for Susan Costa, Mary Lhowe, and Melissa Phillips, without whose help this final text would have been considerably slower in appearing and certainly less well presented. Another word of appreciation goes to those younger researchers who have helped at one stage or another in framing arguments, checking facts and endnotes, and prodding their mentors: Christopher Brodhead, Peter Söderholm, Peter Breil, Jean Garrison, and Charles Hall.

The three of us are sympathetic to multilateral organizations in general, and the United Nations in particular. We believe that the UN fits into a complicated world situation in the 1990s that does not often yield to unilateral undertakings. We believe that the Clinton administration recognized this reality when describing its foreign policy as one that pursued “assertive multilateralism” and has been reluctant to act without collective approval and support. Madeleine Albright, U.S. permanent representative to the United Nations, said in 1993, “There will be many occasions when we need to bring pressure to bear on the belligerents of the post-Cold War period and use our influence to prevent ethnic and other regional conflicts from erupting. But usually we will not want to act alone—our stake will be limited and direct US intervention unwise.”⁴

We do not believe such an orientation is accurately described as “Wilsonian idealism” or uncritical support for world organizations. A preference for multilateral diplomacy is not idealistic at the start of the twenty-first century. We believe

some scholars are helpful in referring to much of world politics as a scene of complex interdependence in which a variety of issues require multilateral treatment largely through peaceful management.

In principle we believe that collectively endorsed policies within the confines of the UN Charter stand a better chance of being successful than others. We usually are suspicious of unilateral actions; we believe in the beneficial effects of channeling perceptions of national interests through the process of collective evaluation. Thus we do not endorse the view that states should use the UN framework only as a last resort or the view of those who would prefer to say of most situations, "Fortunately, the United Nations was not involved."⁵ We believe that much damage has been done to world affairs by states that disregard the UN Charter and shun serious multilateral consultation, whether during the Cold War or after. Multilateral diplomacy can be complicated and messy, but much unilateral action can be dangerous and destructive.

Nevertheless, we point out the weaknesses of the UN system. We do not hesitate to discuss places where the organization has not measured up to reasonable expectations. After all, the UN is not a religion or a church. It is something not to be worshiped but to be critically analyzed. It is basically a political organization, even if it is affected by international law, and it is primarily affected by the foreign policies of member states. We believe that multilateral organizations reflect a world of many connections, but we also believe that constructive criticism of the United Nations is essential for a more peaceful, just, and prosperous world.

If we can get students to better understand the United Nations as a political organization, affected by international law, with its own history; if we can accurately portray the UN as greatly affected by basic changes in its political milieu; and if we can provide insights about what it has done and how these efforts might be improved in the future, we will have succeeded in this endeavor.

Each of the three substantive parts starts with an overview of basic ideas about the UN and that issue area (security, human rights, and sustainable development). Each follows with a historical overview of how the UN has been involved in that issue area and a discussion on changes that might lead to improved UN performance. Current events until the end of 1993 have been incorporated into the text, which is the cutoff for historical examples. Each part situates the broader political changes driving events at the UN; the nature of these political changes appears prominently in both the introduction and conclusion. At the end of the book we include suggestions for further reading.

Thomas G. Weiss
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Notes

1. John G. Stoessinger, *The United Nations and the Superpowers* (New York: Random House, 1966), p. 178.
2. Harold D. Lasswell, *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1936).
3. Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History," *The National Interest* 16 (1989), pp. 3–18; *The End of History and the Last War* (New York: Free Press, 1992).
4. Quoted in the *Washington Post, National Weekly Edition*, June 21–27, 1993, p. 16.
5. Ernest W. Lefever, "Reining in the U.N.: Mistaking the Instrument for the Actor," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer, 1993), p. 20.

Acronyms

ACC	Administrative Committee on Coordination
ACP	African, Caribbean, and Pacific States
ACUNS	Academic Council on the United Nations System
ASCEND	Agenda of Science for Environment and Development
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
CAT	Committee Against Torture
CCMS	Committee on the Challenges on Modern Society
CCSQ	Consultative Committee on Substantive Questions
CEDAW	Committee on Elimination of Discrimination Against Women
CERD	Committee on Elimination of Racial Discrimination
CIDIE	Committee of International Development Institutions on the Environment
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CONGO	Conference on Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status with ECOSOC
CSCE	Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
CSD	Commission on Sustainable Development
DOEM	Designated Officials for Environmental Matters
DOMREP	Mission of the Representative of the Secretary-General in the Dominican Republic
EC	European Community
ECA	Economic Commission for Africa
ECAFE	Economic Commission for Asia and the Far East
ECE	Economic Commission for Europe
ECLA	Economic Commission for Latin America
ECOSOC	Economic and Social Council
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEC	European Economic Community
ELCI	Environment Liaison Centre International
EPTA	Expanded Program of Technical Assistance
ESCWA	Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FMLN	Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front)
G-77	Group of 77 developing countries
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GEF	Global Environmental Facility
IADB	Inter-American Defense Board

IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IBP	International Biological Program
IBRD	International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the World Bank)
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
ICJ	International Court of Justice
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ICSU	International Council of Scientific Unions
IDA	International Development Association
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
IFC	International Facilitating Committee
IFC	International Finance Corporation
IGBP	International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme
IGO	intergovernmental organization
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IMO	International Maritime Organization
IOC	International Oceanographic Commission
ISSC	International Social Science Council
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
IUCN	International Union for the Conservation of Nature and National Resources
JCGP	Joint Consultative Group on Policy
MAB	Man and the Biosphere
MINURSO	UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara
MSC	Military Staff Committee
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NIEO	New International Economic Order
OAS	Organization of American States
OAU	Organization of African Unity
ODA	Overseas Development Administration
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OILPOL	International Convention for the Prevention of Pollution at Sea by Oil
OMS	operational manual statement
ONUC	United Nations Operation in the Congo
ONUCA	United Nations Observer Group in Central America
ONUMOZ	United Nations Operation in Mozambique
ONUSAL	United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador
ONUVEH	United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Electoral Process in Haiti
ONUEN	United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Electoral Process in Nicaragua

OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OPPRC	Oil Pollution Preparedness Response and Cooperation
ORCI	Office for Research and Collection of Information
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PrepCom	UNCHE Preparatory Committee
PVOs	private voluntary organizations
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SADCC	Southern African Development Coordination Conference
SCOPE	Scientific Committee on Problems of the Environment
STABEX	Stabilization of Export Earnings
SUNFED	Special United Nations Fund for Economic Development
SWAPO	South-West Africa People's Organization
TAC	Technical Assistance Committee
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UNAVEM	United Nations Angola Verification Mission
UNCAST	United Nations Conference on Applications of Science and Technology for the Benefit of Less Developed Areas
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNCHE	United Nations Conference on the Human Environment
UNCHS	United Nations Center for Human Settlements (Habitat)
UNCITRAL	United Nations Commission on International Trade Law
UNCLOS	United Nations Conference on the Law of the Seas
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDOF	United Nations Disengagement Observer Force
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRO	United Nations Disaster Relief Office
UNEF	United Nations Emergency Force
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFICYP	United Nations Peace-keeping Force in Cyprus
UNFPA	United Nations Fund for Population Activities
UNGOMAP	United Nations Good Offices Mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UNIFIL	United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon
UNIIMOG	United Nations Iran-Iraq Military Observer Group
UNIKOM	United Nations Iraq-Kuwait Observation Mission
UNIPOM	United Nations India-Pakistan Observation Mission
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola
UNITAF	Unified Task Force (in Somalia)
UNITAR	United Nations Institute for Training and Research
UNMIG	United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia
UNMIH	United Nations Mission in Haiti
UNMOGIP	United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan
UNOGIL	United Nations Observer Group in Lebanon

UNOMIL	United Nations Observer Mission in Liberia
UNOMUR	United Nations Observer Mission in Uganda and Rwanda
UNOSOM	United Nations Operation in Somalia
UNPROFOR	United Nations Protection Force (in the former Yugoslavia)
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UNSF	United Nations Security Force
UNTAC	United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia
UNTAG	United Nations Transition Assistance Group in Namibia
UNTEA	United Nations Temporary Executive Authority
UNTSO	United Nations Truce Supervision Organization
UNYOM	United Nations Yemen Observation Mission
UPU	Universal Postal Union
VOLAGS	volunteer agencies
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WCRP	World Climate Research Programme
WEU	Western European Union
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organization
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WMO	World Meteorological Organization
WRI	World Resources Institute
WTO	Warsaw Treaty Organization
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

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