

Lecture:

The Universe of International Organizations

There are about 400 Intergovernmental organizations in the international system, that is, roughly twice the number of state actors in the system. The universe of IGOs covers a wide variety of both global and regional organizations, although the majority of international organizations are regional. Global organizations have ranged in scope from such important multipurpose organizations as the League of Nations and the United Nations, to very functionally specific organizations such as the International Whaling Commission. On the global level, the most important IGOs are the United Nations and Specialized agencies such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. The European Union and NATO are the most important organizations on the regional level.

The United Nations

The United Nations [United Nations](#) was created as the successor to the failed League of Nations in 1945. The main purpose of the United Nations was to prevent another world war from occurring, through the application of the principles of collective security. Collective security, in which the organized power of the international community was supposed to be sufficient to deter and punish aggression, was considered to be the embodiment of a higher moral good, as compared to aggression which was seen as synonymous with evil. The [Charter](#) of the United Nations, which envisaged the construction of a new, just world order, was based upon the principles of liberal internationalism. However, it is important to point out that the United Nations is not a world government, but rather a treaty-based organization which consists of sovereign states. The UN is deeply embedded in the Westphalian international system of sovereign states. The UN can only be as effective as its most powerful members want it to be.

The [organization](#) of the United Nations

The United Nations has six major organs: the Security Council, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council, the Trusteeship Council, the Secretariat, and the International Court of Justice. Note that the Secretary-General is the chief administrative and executive officer of the UN. The Secretary-General is elected for a term of five years, and usually serves two terms, although there are no restrictions on the number of terms that he can serve. So far, no woman has ever been elected Secretary-General.

The Security Council

The Security Council is the most important organ of the United Nations, since it has been entrusted with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. The Security Council has a [membership](#) of 15, five permanent members and ten non-permanent members. The five [permanent members](#) of the Security Council are the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom. The permanent members are considered Great Powers, are not elected, and enjoy a special voting right known as the veto. The veto means that any single permanent member of the Security Council can prevent it from acting by casting a



negative vote (on a substantive) issue. Between 1946 and 2007, close to 260 vetoes have been cast

Non-Permanent members of the Security Council

The non-permanent members of the United Nations are elected for a term of two years on the basis of the principle of equitable geographical distribution. The world is divided into a number of electoral districts as follows: 5 for Afro-Asia, 2 for Latin America and the Caribbean, 2 for Western Europe and Others, and 1 for Eastern Europe. The election for a non-permanent seat in the Security Council can often be quite heated. For example, in October 2000, the U.S. lobbied very hard to prevent the Sudan from being elected to one of the seats allocated to the Afro-Asian region. The U.S. argued that it was wrong to elect the Sudan to the Security Council because it was the target of sanctions by the Security Council, owing to an abortive attempt to assassinate President Mubarak of Egypt. After four ballots, Mauritius, the U.S. sponsored candidate prevailed, because of the support of India, and the decision of Uganda to switch its vote.

Reform the Security Council

Most third world members of the United Nations support the reform of the Security Council so that it could function as a more democratic and representative organization. Although the United Nations has almost increased its membership fourfold since 1945 (from 51 to 189) the number of permanent members of the Security Council has remained the same—five. The legitimacy of the Security Council and the United Nations would be enhanced if the number of permanent members were expanded to reflect the changes that have occurred in the international system since 1945. The leading candidates for permanent seats in the Security Council are Germany and Japan, both supported by the U.S. If Germany and Japan were added, it would also be necessary to add three more, one from each of the major regions of Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Leading candidates for a permanent seat from Africa are Nigeria and South Africa, from Asia—India, and from Latin America—Brazil. Reform might also require a decision as to what to do with the veto, since many members of the UN regard the veto as undemocratic and subject to abuse by the permanent members. Critics of the U.S. argue that the veto allows it to practice "hegemonism".

General Assembly

The General Assembly is the Parliamentary or legislative body of the UN. All 189 members of the UN are represented in the General Assembly. In many ways, the General Assembly resembles a national legislative body, but the critical difference is that its decisions are taken in the form of resolutions which have no binding effects on its members, but only carry the force of recommendations (except for such matters as the allocation of dues). The General Assembly usually adopts between 250-300 resolutions per session, most of which are adopted by consensus without a vote. About 20% of the resolutions are adopted on the basis of a vote. Usually, votes are taken on those resolutions which deal with such controversial issues as the policies of Israel in the Middle East.

Each state has one vote in the General Assembly, which has resulted in calls for a system of weighted voting, somewhat similar to the one used in the European Parliament of the European Union. Most votes take place within the framework of groups or blocs, with the largest groups such as the G-77, holding the balance of power. As the European Union has expanded, its influence in the General Assembly has also grown. Other important groups in the General Assembly include the Non-Aligned Movement and the Islamic Conference.



For many years, the voting patterns of the blocs in the UN were locked into a rigid Cold war pattern. However, with the end of the Cold War, there has been a realignment of voting patterns in the UN. For example, the former East European communist states now vote more frequently with the West on most issues.

The United States

The U.S. dominated the General Assembly in the 1940s and the 1950s. But, beginning in the 1960s, the membership in the United Nations began to change with an influx of states from the developing world. Consequently, the United States lost its automatic voting majority, and complained about the "tyranny of the majority." During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, the U.S. increasingly found itself voting in the minority, as the balance of voting power resided in the hands of the Third World.

Also remember, that the U.S. had always had a tendency to view itself as an exceptional state in its relations with international organizations. The U.S. never joined the League of Nations, withdrew from the International Labor Organization in 1977 and rejoined it three years later, and withdrew from UNESCO, but later rejoined it during the Bush administration, offering an exception to the general character of President's Bush's foreign policy which was based on unilateralism and the marginalization of international organizations..

Relations between the United States and the United Nations have worsened as the U.S. has withheld its regular and peacekeeping dues. The U.S. has linked the payment of its assessments to the reduction of its regular and peacekeeping assessments, as well as the introduction of wide-ranging reforms in the UN system to transform the UN into a more efficient organization. Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. Ambassador to the 55th General Assembly was able to broker a deal in which U.S. assessments were reduced.

However, relations between the United States and the UN suffered a major setback when the United States was not elected to a seat on the Human Rights Commission in October 2000, for the first time since 1947. The United States had used the Human Rights Commission to introduce resolutions criticizing the human rights record of China and Cuba (note that the U.S. itself is vulnerable to criticism because of its use of capital punishment). At the same time, a U.S. representative also was not elected to the International Narcotics Control Board. The reaction of the U.S. House of Representatives to the U.S. defeat was to withhold over \$240 million that had been promised as part of the deal brokered by Ambassador Holbrooke to pay Washington's arrears to the organization. US relations with the United Nations reached its lowest point in March 2003, when the United States and some of its allies decided to invade Iraq, without a legitimizing resolution from the United Nations Security Council.

Peacekeeping

The reputation of the United Nations is usually associated with its track record in [peacekeeping](#). The United Nations was created at the San Francisco Conference in April 1945 by the international community to have another try at maintaining stability in the international system through the application of the principles of collective security. It was hoped that the war-time Grand Alliance between the Soviet Union and the United States would continue into the post-war world. The "Big Two" would function as the policemen of the world.



The superpowers would maintain international order through the Security Council of the United Nations. A permanent international military force was supposed to be created to function as the enforcement arm of the Security Council. The outbreak of the Cold War made this impossible.

The lack of a permanent international military force meant that the UN had to improvise in dealing with conflict situations. This resulted in the invention of peacekeeping, which is not mentioned anywhere in the UN Charter. During its lifetime, the United Nations has engaged in over 50 peacekeeping and chapter VII enforcement type operations, although sometimes it is rather difficult to tell the difference between the two.

Peacekeeping operations have assumed a variety of novel forms and shapes over the years. These have ranged from the classic buffer force designed to observe a cease-fire between the belligerents (such as the first United Nations Emergency Force which was deployed in the Sinai Peninsula from 1956 to 1967) to more complex multidimensional forces. For example, the multidimensional peacekeeping and peace enforcement forces of the 1990s were also called upon to engage in various post-conflict and peace-building activities. These activities involved the reconstruction of civil society in failed states, the demobilization and disarmament of belligerents, the supervision of elections, the reconstruction of a society's infrastructure, the delivery of humanitarian aid, and safeguarding and facilitating the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their countries and homes.

In the latter 1980s and early 1990s, there was an explosion of UN peacekeeping operations, which unrealistically raised expectations that the United Nations would be able to function as a major actor in preventing and resolving conflicts. However, the credibility of the UN suffered serious setbacks as it failed to prevent ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia and the horrific genocide which occurred in Rwanda in the early 1990s.

One of the reasons for these failures was that the UN was originally designed to deal with interstate conventional war, and not intra-state conflicts which have emerged as the major form of conflict since the end of the Cold War. Furthermore, the UN itself was embedded in a realist conception of international order. This was based on the Westphalian system which rested on the fundamental principle of the primacy of state sovereignty.

The Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention

This has now been challenged by the Annan doctrine of humanitarian intervention which is based on the concept of the two sovereignties, where the sovereignty of the individual should take precedence over the sovereignty of the state, when gross violations of human rights take place. The state should no longer have the right to do whatever it wants to within its own borders, to defy the international community with a "culture of impunity". The international community has been moving in the direction of establishing the principle that it should intervene when the human rights of individuals are being violated by their own government. This challenges the traditional notion of sovereignty that a state has the right to do whatever it wants to on its own territory, a concept that has served as one of the fundamental principles of international order since 1648, and the Treaty of Westphalia which established states as sovereign, independent actors in the international system. The international community has also moved in the direction of holding political leaders who commit war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide, and ethnic cleansing accountable for their actions. In 1993, the UN Security Council created an ad hoc Tribunal for the Former [Yugoslavia](#), to indict and put on trial those who had committed war crimes in the wars of the Yugoslavian succession that raged in the Balkans since 1993. Slobodan



Milosevic, the former Serbian and Yugoslavian President, has been on trial at the Hague for the past few years and died before the trial was over. Under the Statute of the ad hoc Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, he did not face capital punishment but life imprisonment. The UN Security Council also created a special tribunal to punish war criminals who had been involved in the genocide that [took place in Rwanda in 1994](#), which resulted in the slaughter of about 800,000 people. Finally, an [International Criminal Court](#) that was created in 1998, has now received a sufficient number of ratifications to be operating. Currently in 2004, there was a [great deal](#) of concern that the world was witnessing the unfolding of another case of genocide in the [Sudan](#), and should engage in a humanitarian intervention there before it was too late.

Since the founding of the United Nations in 1945, the international community has established a network of treaties and declarations that are designed to protect the human rights of individuals and groups against violation by their own governments as well as aggressors. These instruments [which establish norms that are designed to guide the behavior of states range from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted in 1948, to the Convention against genocide, the 1966 International Covenants protecting civil and political rights as well as economic, social and cultural rights, and among other things, even a Convention against torture.](#) In the post 9/11 era, all of this becomes relevant because one of the reasons given by the U.S. to justify the invasion of Iraq was to liberate the Iraqi population which had been subjected to a gross violation of human rights by the cruel tyranny of the regime of Saddam Hussein. However, not all states wholeheartedly support the concept of humanitarian intervention to engage in regime change. The UN Charter does not contain any provisions in it which legitimizes regime change.

Proponents of humanitarian intervention argue that the international community has an obligation to intervene, even though article 2(7) of the UN Charter stipulates that the UN should not interfere in a matter which falls within the domestic jurisdiction of a state. However, an exception to this is if the state that is concerned is the object of a chapter VII enforcement action under the UN charter. Humanitarian intervention, according to Kofi Annan, the UN Secretary-General, should take place within the framework of UN approval. Therefore, Annan disapproved of NATO's air war against Serbia in 1999, which took place without the approval of the Security Council, because the United States believed that both Russia and China would veto such action. On the other hand, the UN Security Council approved a "coalition of the willing" which intervened in East Timor in 1999 (after securing the approval of the Indonesian government) when massive violations of the [human rights of the East Timorese](#) took place. However, one of the major problems is deciding when [humanitarian intervention](#) should take place, particularly since it comes up against the thorny issue of state sovereignty which has constituted the foundation of world order since 1648.

The central question is at what point should the international community move beyond humanitarian intervention and engage in military intervention. Other questions that are associated with this issue are who should authorize military intervention, and how can one make sure that such military intervention is not designed to serve the national interests of a single state or a group of states. Who can determine when a threshold has been crossed by the government of a state which has committed the gross and mass violation of human rights of its own people which would trigger military intervention. How many people have to be killed before such intervention occurs.?

Reform Peacekeeping

The failure of UN peacekeeping operations in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda, stimulated efforts to improve UN peacekeeping and peace enforcement capabilities. UN



peacekeeping forces should be set up with clear mandates of their missions from the Security Council. The United Nations needed more manpower and financial resources to do this. It was necessary for the U.S. to pay the arrears that it owed for UN peacekeeping. The UN's department of peacekeeping operations also needed to be strengthened. Most important of all was the need for the UN to have a rapid reaction force which could move into deteriorating situations quickly, in order to avoid another tragedy like Rwanda or the current tragedy unfolding in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in which it is estimated that between 1 to 2.5 million people have already perished.

The UN should continue to rely on regional and sub-regional organizations and "coalitions of the willing" to compensate for its lack of resources and will on the part of some of the permanent members of the Security Council. However, reliance on regional organizations and arrangements can have its disadvantages, because it could allow a regional hegemon to maintain a sphere of influence in the neighboring geographical area where it is engaged in peacekeeping.

Sanctions

Peacekeeping represents an extreme form of sanction available to the international community to deal with lawbreakers. Economic sanctions are another tool which can be used by the international community against states and elites guilty of committing acts of aggression. However, economic sanctions (as seen in the case of Iraq) can be indiscriminate in their effects and cause unnecessary suffering in the civilian population of the target state. The United Nations has continued to refine the application of "smart sanctions", which target the elites of a state through travel bans and freezing their assets. Recently, the UN has targeted the sale of "conflict diamonds" which have been used to purchase arms and enrich ordinary criminals in such countries as Sierra Leone.

The Resurgence of UN Peacekeeping

After the downsizing of UN Peacekeeping in the mid-1990s, there was a surge in demand for UN peacekeepers in the latter part of the 1990s. There was a demand for UN peacekeepers as old civil wars restarted or new conflicts emerged in such places as Kosovo, East Timor, Sierra Leone, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Ethiopia and Eritrea. Once again the UN responded in a hasty and improvised fashion, for instance, resulting in the humiliation of the peacekeepers in Sierra Leone.

Afghanistan

However, the United Nations was faced with its first major peacekeeping crisis of the 21st century in the war against terrorism which the United States unleashed against the Taliban and the Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan in the Fall of 2001. The United States, through a combination of air power and working with the anti-Taliban forces known as the Northern Alliance (a coalition consisting of such ethnic minorities as Tajiks and Uzbeks) scored a series of victories, pushing the Taliban further south and creating the necessity for the deployment of an international force to maintain security. However, the UN was not prepared at the time to deploy a force of peacekeepers, especially in view of the opposition of the US military command. Countries such as Turkey expressed a willingness to participate in a multinational force that would consist of a coalition of the willing drawn from Moslem states, while the Northern Alliance at first expressed a preference for an all-Afghan force. The question of the deployment of a UN force was also linked



to its efforts to create a provisional government of national reconciliation in Afghanistan that would aid in the reconstruction of civil society.

In the final analysis, it makes more sense for the United Nations to engage in preventive diplomacy. It is better to try and prevent a conflict from escalating out of control in the first place. As Secretary-General Annan has pointed out, it makes more sense for the international community to replace a "culture of reaction" with a "culture of prevention."

Terrorism

The terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, resulted in a quick reaction by the United Nations, in which Secretary-General Kofi Annan, the Security Council, and the General Assembly all condemned it. Speaking before the opening of the 56th General Assembly of the UN, Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed his "deep shock and revulsion at the cold-blooded viciousness of this attack" and observed that "terrorism is an international scourge, which the United Nations has many times condemned." On September 12, the Security Council unanimously adopted resolution 1368, in which it "unequivocally condemned in the strongest possible terms the horrifying terrorist act which took place on 11 September, 2001 as a threat to international peace and security." The General Assembly adopted resolution 56/1 in which it condemned the terrorist attacks on America. The Secretary-general called for the implementation of all twelve UN Conventions dealing with terrorism. The United Nations and its related agencies had been dealing with the phenomenon of terrorism, ever since the early 1960s, when it took the form of hijackings of aircraft. Before September 11, 2001, the United Nations had adopted a total of twelve [conventions](#) and agreements dealing with various aspects of terrorism. These ranged from acts of terrorism aboard civil aircraft to the need to provide for the physical protection of nuclear material being transported internationally to protecting ships from terrorist acts as well. However, as of the summer of 2004, the General Assembly had been unable to arrive at an agreement on a comprehensive convention dealing with terrorism.