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Chapter 1 – Evolving International Organizations: the UN Past and Present

“[He] wondered why men could rarely harness this same sense of oneness toward good ends. Men would sacrifice their own interests, even their own lives, welding themselves together with bonds that far surpassed ordinary life, toward the purpose of killing one another. But when it came to creating beauty and life and love, too often men were left to act alone, their every act weighed against self-interest and simple inertia. If men were as good at creating heaven on earth as they were at creating hell, it would be a very different world.” Rachel Lee (2007: 474)

To really understand the United Nations it is not sufficient just to describe its structures, personnel and activities. It is first necessary to explain its beginnings and the intentions of its founders. And then the hard part begins: we have to weigh its strengths and weaknesses and analyze its components. This is the plan for this chapter.

Early international cooperation efforts

The United Nations is not the first but the third in a series of international organizations that date back to 1815. To give some historical context to the establishment and workings of the United Nations as it is today, the first part of this chapter describes these organizations and the key events that led to their creation (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Evolution of international organizations, until 1945



The Concert of Europe

The Concert of Europe was founded by the Treaty of Vienna, which put an end to the Napoleonic Wars that had lasted nearly 20 years. In many ways it set the mold for its successors: the League of Nations and the United Nations. Like these last two, the Concert was founded in the aftermath of a devastating war waged by a group of allies to stop one nation from trying to set up an empire to dominate the world. The word ‘concert’ was intended to mean a bringing together of states in a concerted effort to work on common concerns. It was a radical departure from the past. At the time, it was called “a principle of general union, uniting all the states collectively with a federative bond, under the guidance of the five principal Powers” (Mazower 2013: 4). Up until the Napoleonic Wars, Europe (as other parts of the world) was ordered by an ever-changing “balance of power” by which each sovereign state attempted to maximize its own interests and stop any state or group of states from obtaining overwhelming dominance. This was the continually shifting basis of foreign policy. Napoleon’s France had upset this balance. The allied powers wanted to re-establish it on a permanent basis.

Thus, the Concert of Europe was like a continuing coalition of the Great Power victors of the Napoleonic Wars (Russia, Prussia, Austria and Great Britain, plus the newly monarchical France). Its role was to convene meetings on a regular basis or upon need and to include other smaller countries to discuss overlapping interests and their efforts to maintain stable European relations. The Concert’s two major functions were to maintain peace between countries and to ensure the internal stability of the established monarchical governments against nationalist, liberal and democratic revolts. Consultation often checked aggressive impulses. It generally achieved its twin goals for more than a half century from 1815 until the Franco-Prussian war in 1870-71.

The Concert of Europe sought to manage the affairs of the continent by binding all states to the rules of the international game. Sometimes this could only be achieved by intervening in the affairs of others. In fact, the word ‘international’ was a relatively new concept that suggested there were ongoing links between states despite their past habit of just wanting to ‘do their own thing’ based on their sovereign independence. This right of sovereign nationalism harked back to the 1648 Peace of Westphalia—which itself put an end to Europe’s Thirty Years War. Nevertheless, on several occasions after the French Revolution, the Concert did not hesitate to interfere in the internal affairs of states to enforce a conservative restoration. For instance, in 1823 Concert members invaded Spain to drive a revolutionary government out of Madrid.

International relations grew slowly but steadily in the 19th century. Between 1840 and 1914, there were nearly 3,000 international gatherings. More than 450 international, private or non-governmental organizations were created and

the Concert itself grew to 37 governmental organizations. International NGOs invited themselves to the international meetings, thus becoming new ‘actors’ in international relations and the forerunners of today’s ‘civil society’. Their ‘competitor’ was the historic notion of sovereignty (see Box 1).

Box 1: Understanding ‘sovereignty’

Sovereignty grew out of the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 to define the legal identity of a state in international law. Each state is considered to have sovereign equality. There is a corresponding obligation to respect each other’s sovereignty by not intervening in another’s internal affairs. Internally, sovereignty signifies the capacity of the government to make authoritative decisions through exclusive jurisdiction within its territorial boundaries, which it has the right to defend. This is international law and its principles are hotly defended, but, obviously, it is not the international reality. The ‘sovereign equality of states’ is enshrined in Article 2.1 of the UN Charter. The principle of ‘non-intervention’ is to be found in Article 2.7. The ‘right of self-defence’ is embodied in Article 51. The UN Secretary-General has discussed the dilemma of the two concepts of sovereignty, one vested in the state and the second in the people and individuals. The *Report of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty* proposed the extension of the concept to include ‘responsibility’ alongside ‘control’, so that state authorities would have the responsibility to protect their citizens and would be responsible to the international community through the UN. This gave rise to the UN’s 2005 resolution on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P).

Source: International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, 2001: 12-3

Right from the beginning of international institutions, there was debate over how much the creation of a set of arrangements to maintain peace and stability could legitimize intervention in the affairs of others—debates which continue with the new UN policy of Responsibility to Protect (R2P). International affairs are not just about the arrangement of relationships. They are also about dominant ideas and a desire for power. So, it was said, “The Concert of Europe had not mastered the new art of international government; it was, on the contrary, a symbol of the very problems—autocratic leadership, bellicosity, an incomprehension of the values of freedom and the power of social change—that a true internationalism was needed to solve.” (Mazower 2013: 12).

In reality, foreign relations in 1815 were really the playthings of sovereign monarchs and their aristocratic ministers who were determined that Europe would not only remain stable but would crush radical democratic tendencies. One example was the French Foreign Minister, Prince Talleyrand, who used

his diplomatic dexterity to insist that France, although defeated, was too central to Europe to be dismembered. These men dominated the 1815 peace treaty, Congress of Vienna, and the Europe to which it gave rise. And they were only men because, with a few exceptions like Queen Elizabeth I, women were not involved in foreign relations until after the Second World War when Eleanor Roosevelt and several colleagues implanted the Universal Charter of Human Rights within the United Nations.

We can also recognize that international organizations are not purely political creations; they also reflect their time and their context. In many ways, politics follows the lead of economics and technology. Thus, the development of international organizations throughout the 1800s was greatly inspired by industrialization, and the expansion of railways and shipping beyond national boundaries. Business sought continent-wide security for markets and investments. Together, science and commerce framed the modern thinking that made possible the ideas of internationalism. Modern forms of trade and transport led to the forming of 'public international unions' (the forerunners of today's 'specialized agencies' at the UN) in the fields of transport, communications, weights and measures, statistics, patents, agriculture, labour, science, policing and sanitation. In addition, international movements for workers, women and peace formed world public opinion.

If fact, there have been a great number of influences on the development of international organizations. Although we recognize that the impetus for international organization comes out of the chaos of post-war disintegration, theorists maintain that, in general, an evolutionary or 'genetic' perspective seems best suited for us to understand how they developed from a host of interests (national and international, public and private), as well as internal learning processes and even the very act of international conferencing (Reinalda: 2001). Evidence suggests that in international organizations, innovation often comes out of lively and continuous debate originating in scientific, technical and humanistic communities (Reinalda 2001; Schemel 2003). Indeed, the conferencing process creates a temporary equality among unequals and encourages the sort of open discussion that often gives rise to innovation (Murphy 1994: 62).

Conferencing was also conducive to developing the techniques and the psychological aptitudes required for successful multilateral negotiation (Claude 1966: 23). Engaged thinkers and practitioners found they could implement their ideas on a world scale and sometimes were called upon to prepare government positions. In other cases, NGOs learned that governments can be moved toward cooperation by private or unofficial pressures, when skillfully applied (Lyon 1963: 154). Changes in domestic politics such as new governments and political leaders can constitute windows of opportunity for new advances at the international level (Reinalda 2003: 9).

A note on the creation of the League of Nations

The context just described was both the process and the inducement for the forming of international institutions from the 1850s to the 1900s. It was also part of the background for the formation of the League of Nations in 1919 following the First World War. Other inducements were the atrocious loss of life, the destruction of countries, the wartime cooperation of the allies, and the need for an on-going organization as a forum to promote peace rather than war. Also of great significance was the spirited leadership of the American President, Woodrow Wilson. After the Second World War in 1945 it was much the same story that led to the United Nations except the leadership came from a new American President, Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The League of Nations was founded in January 1920 as a result of the Paris Peace Conference and the Treaty of Versailles which terminated the First World War. As the world's first permanent intergovernmental organization, its principle objective was to maintain world peace via collective security, disarmament and arbitration. It had an initial 44 state members, which rose to 58 in 1935. Its headquarters were established in Geneva immediately after its founding.

As we will see, the various in-depth analyses of the founding of the League and the UN teach us much about the causality, meaning and intentions of international organizations (see Mazower, Reinalda, Schlesinger, Archer and Trent). The League came about as a result of history, national interests, ideas, and personalities. It was a combination of 'big bang' politics responding to the war, and evolutionary development based on historical precedent. When it came to thinking about post-war institutions, the allied participants in the 1919 Paris Peace Conference (dominated by the US, France, Great Britain and Italy, with personalities like Jan Smuts of South Africa as additional players) had in their minds their cooperation during the war but also the internationalism of the past century. In their deliberations, they considered a number of options: resurrecting a new version of the old Concert; a model based on the American Monroe Doctrine which proclaimed US sway over Latin America; the British Empire transformed into a Commonwealth; and simply of a return to balance of power politics.

The thinking that predominated was essentially that of Great Britain and the US. Being great powers, neither wanted any new arrangements to tie their hands too much. They wanted to maintain the Anglo-American alliance but in a larger format that did not look too self-interested or racist. The French and the British did not want the League to interfere with their imperial ambitions. Many thought the new arrangements should be as light as possible and be centred on negotiations, international law, mediation and arbitration. For both the League and the UN, the wartime experience of cooperation was crucial as a

seedbed for more centralized and systematic world relationships and the importance of procedure and precedents.

But when push came to shove, it was the negotiations between the leaders of the major, victorious powers which drove the founding of both the League of Nations and the United Nations. In Paris in 1919, U.S. President Woodrow Wilson ended up in protracted negotiations with the French President Georges Clemenceau, British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and Italian Prime Minister Vittorio Orlando—leaders who were equally creatures of their own personalities, philosophies and visions, and influenced by their close advisers. Known as the ‘Big Four’, these leaders had no intentions of relinquishing control of the conference agenda—a tradition that is maintained to this day.

They also maintained the earlier tradition of diplomatic secrecy because they thought not to do so would be “a veritable suicide” for their negotiations. But they surrendered to the growing demands of journalists for regular plenary sessions and briefings. Small states were “given something to do” as an addendum to the Council and in the powerless Assembly. Following the submission of plans by various leaders, thinkers and associations, Robert Cecil, the British undersecretary of foreign affairs, was able to provide a draft text for the League, based in part on a study of historical precedents (as the American Secretary of State later did for the UN). It was discussed, amended and adopted in two months. However, it would be incorrect to think there were no other significant influences on the peace negotiations. Among the other major influences were: the blending of morality and realpolitik in the provocative ideas of Jan Smuts, Prime Minister of South Africa; the London intellectual elite including Leonard Woolf, who had written a suggestive book entitled *International Government*; the demands of small allies, especially those in the nascent British Commonwealth who had helped win the war; and popular associations (now NGOs) such as the League of Nations Association.

The League of Nations as an institution

To the degree that he wanted a permanent organization, President Wilson of the United States wanted to keep power with the politicians in a forum for quasi-parliamentary deliberations rather than with the lawyers in a sort of super judicial court. He wanted an institution that would evolve with the collective will. He also wanted to protect the territorial integrity of the growing number of nation-states in a universal association of nations capable of acting in the common interest to help prevent war. “The days of the Treaty of Vienna are long past,” as British Prime Minister Lloyd George put it, referring to the birth of the Concert of Europe (Mazower 2013: 127). There were, of course, many contradictions. The general principle of national self-determination remained vague. Britain, the great imperial power, thought that the Empire itself

resembled “a league of nations”. Prior to the Paris Peace Conference, many questions remained. How much executive power would a League possess? How far would it be committed to protect established boundaries? Could sanctions be automatically triggered? How far would the League go beyond being just a more permanent conference system?

However, history shows that once at the Peace Conference, personal diplomacy took over. A committee chaired by Wilson rapidly approved the British draft agreement. There would be a tripartite division of powers in a parliamentary type organization. It consisted of: a Council with Great Power permanent members and four elected, rotating lesser powers in a sort of ‘upper chamber’; a one-member, one-vote Assembly; a relatively weak secretary-general in an administrative rather than a diplomatic post; and, in 1922, a Permanent Court of International Justice.

The Council’s permanent members were France, Great Britain, Italy and Japan (the US did not join). Eventually, the Assembly’s 40 members, meeting at the new headquarters in Geneva, represented minimally the various parts of the still-colonized world. Almost all of Africa, Asia and the Middle East were controlled by European imperial powers. The Assembly had no law-making functions and each member could veto any action. In any case, the League lacked any standing forces or mechanisms for enforcing peace. All it could do was to recommend arbitration, sanctions and boycotts. It was even unable to apply sufficient pressures in clear-cut cases of aggression. Nevertheless, it did introduce a democratic dimension of public deliberation and opinion. Also, the full Assembly only met once a year, so the rest of the time the League’s merit-based civil servants were free to take the initiative.

This became a major dimension of the League and its definitive heritage. The bureaucracy was created by Eric Drummond, a mid-level official of the British Foreign Office, who went on to hold the office of Secretary-General for 14 years, longer than anyone either at the League or the UN. Having built a small (650), highly professional international civil service, one with permanence and autonomy that favoured expertise over diplomacy, he became one of the architects of modern international organizations. It was divided into functional secretariats that “cemented the connection between internationalism and technical expertise” (Mazower 2013: 148). For instance, German and Soviet officials worked with the League’s technical services before their countries even formally joined. The Secretariat also took advantage of Articles 23 and 24 of the League’s Covenant which gave it wide responsibilities and allowed it to become an umbrella organization that gathered under its auspices the 31 international bureaus (also called ‘permanent conferences’ or ‘public international unions’) that had been formed before the First World War.

One example of the League’s extraordinary feats as a humanitarian organization was its overseeing of emergency relief camps giving succour to the Russian, Armenian and Greek refugees in the Balkans in the early 1920s. They ran

and financed tented encampments and brought in health experts to stop infectious diseases. They helped the Greek government get loans to resettle hundreds of thousands of refugees. They created the Refugee Settlement Commission to build new settlements, even small towns. This effort by a government organization was entirely new. It had previously been the work of charities. We can easily see how there is an eerie resemblance to events in the Middle East since 2010 and may ask: why is the world still having to deal with the same horrific problems one century later?

The League also became recognized for gathering data and issuing volumes of statistics. Its health, transport, and financial and economic sections became indispensable in the interwar years. Strangely enough, many of its personnel came from the United States and much of its technical funding came from the Rockefeller Foundation. It worked hard to restore monetary stability but lost out to the protectionism of the Great Depression. Its members prided themselves on being impartial and above national interests (unlike the UN) but not above paternalistic interference in member states' internal affairs. Overall, some two hundred employees of the League's Secretariat went on to work for the UN and even to be leaders of a number of post-Second World War international organizations—including Jean Monnet, who would become one of the founding fathers of the European Union.

That said, the League was battered continuously by horrendous public calamities, the defection of prominent members and the battle of ideologies. In 1918 and 1919, Spanish influenza affected one fifth of the world's population and killed between 20 and 40 million people, exceeding the deaths during the First World War. More deadly than the Black Plague in the 1300s, it was the worst scourge ever to sweep the world. But the League also had to face continuing war and a refugee crisis in the Middle East, economic collapse in Eastern Europe and a public health disaster including influenza, typhus and mass starvation. In addition, Western leaders were terrified by the spread of communism from Russia's revolution, which was welcomed by many in Western Europe due to economic collapse and massive unemployment. On top of all this, the new League was called upon to administer the territory of the Saar and the Free City of Danzig and look after the plight of the Christians in Turkey and the status of Armenia. By 1929, the world fell into the grip of the Great Depression.

The defection of prominent states never ceased. Perhaps the cruellest blow to the League was the vote by the U.S. Senate against joining President Wilson's brain-child. The decision reflected a refusal by part of the political elite to become enmeshed in 'entangling alliances' and the world's troubles. Public support for the League was low, and there was resistance in Congress to making commitments to international organizations that would hamper the freedom of action of the United States. It was a fine example of American isolationism—something that still lingers today. But it was paired with a will to

international leadership, exemplified in the interwar years by the private endowments which financed support for the League and for institutes, journals, international relations clubs and conferences to train Americans for their role in the world.

For its part, the Soviet Union did not even join the League until 1934 and then was the only state to be kicked out after it invaded Finland in 1939. Germany, which had not been welcomed at the beginning, joined in 1926 and then withdrew under Hitler's Nazi regime in 1933. Mussolini's fascist Italy followed in 1937 after having invaded Ethiopia. Japan, unhappy with criticism of its occupation of Manchuria, withdrew in 1933. Germany, Italy and Japan, which would become known as the Axis powers, each had a grudge against the dominant colonial system the League represented. They wanted what the French and British had. They wanted territory, colonies and power. For them there was a power imbalance in the world represented by the League. This virtually left Great Britain and France among the Great Powers and they were still too ravaged by their losses during the First World War to devote energy to saving the League. What with its heavy burdens and quarrelling members, the League was not able to stop the slide to a new world war.

The battle of ideologies consisted mainly of multiple attacks on the Western theoretical claim about the fairness of international law, equally applied to equal states, as a keystone of the League. For instance, the Western empires did not even subject themselves to minority rights treaties. What Germany, Italy and Japan had in common was their criticism that the League was just a 'fig leaf' to keep in place a territorial status quo that favoured Great Britain, France and the US. The same criticism was to be levelled later about the UN. Hegemony, the leadership of one or more states, was the central German conception of world rule. Japan too saw the League as protecting the self-interests of the imperialists in Asia.

The Soviet Union weighed in with the establishment of the 'Third International' in 1919 as a direct rival to the League of Nations. Lenin even referred to the League as a "stinking corpse" (Mazower 2013: 177). Soviet diplomats became more measured and conciliatory though, even joining the League in 1934. For Moscow, its security came before revolution. For its part, Italy promoted a 'fascist internationalism' in a fascist European confederation, supposedly fighting for the rights of European nation-states.

One can see arising out of these affirmations of sovereignty and nationalism the destabilizing potential from which the UN too would suffer. The leading American political scientist, Quincy Wright, worried that, "totalitarianism has unmasked the inadequacy of the philosophical and political foundations of international law." (Mazower 2013: 187). Its impartial authority lay in tatters. International law would require a demonstration of shared values and interests, alongside the enforcement capacity.

Box 2: Strengths and failures of the League of Nations

- The quasi-parliamentary model at the League's core was abused from the start by members who came to Geneva more for theatrics than policy-making. The pre-war ideals of open negotiations and diplomacy to stimulate world public opinion ended up creating unfulfilled expectations.
- The unanimity rule (i.e., each member holding a veto) made decisions hard to reach, thus condemning the organization to impotency.
- Its irresolution was magnified by its lack of any means of enforcement or deterrent such as armed forces or a police force so that even the rules and laws it did proclaim lacked authority.
- The League was operating on a shoestring in a period of financial stringency. Its budget of \$5 million a year was less than a thirtieth of the UN's—also considered minuscule in today's multi-billion-dollar world.
- Due to these failures, the League was not able to provide answers to the urgent crises of the day, thus reinforcing public perceptions of its inefficacy.
- The League's technical services provided by its professional civil service took international humanitarian cooperation and the promotion of science much further than anyone had imagined possible before the First World War. It offered the promise of democratization and social transformation through technical expertise.
- Its technical, intellectual and scientific skills proved the value of an international organization. Even if it was a diplomatic failure, its expertise and international action became a model for the evolutionary growth of cooperative behaviour due in part to its flexibility and multitasking.
- Not all initiatives worked out. For instance, the Institute for Intellectual Cooperation had few tangible results as Europe fragmented ideologically, and few states ratified the 1937 Treaty for an International Criminal Court (60 years before its time)—even the French proposal for a federal union of Europe to combat the Depression was not successful!
- The League's enduring influence was as a vehicle for world leadership based on moral principles and the formal equality of sovereign states. It managed to marry the democratic ideal of a society of nations with the reality of Great Power hegemony.

We recall all this (along with the League's strengths and failures outlined in Box 2) now to remind ourselves of the sensitivity of international organizations to the politics of their member states, and to the continuous attacks by ideologues, by the media and by an unreasoning public.

From the League of Nations to the United Nations

One day during a visit to Washington in 1941, Prime Minister Churchill was just getting out of his bath when President Roosevelt rolled his chair in and declared that he had thought of the perfect name for the new organization: the United Nations. Churchill immediately agreed it was a brilliant idea (Mazower 2013: 197). It is little known that, although the UN was not officially founded until the San Francisco Conference in 1945, the Second World War was fought under the auspices of the United Nations Alliance in which 26 allies joined the United States and Great Britain. With their backs to the wall, the war years were in many ways the heydays of liberal multilateralism and institution building. The war encouraged cooperation. In terms of international relations theory, we may conclude that building the UN was evidence that multilateralism and robust intergovernmental organizations were viewed as "realist necessities, not liberal window dressing" (Plesch & Weiss 2015: 199).

In 1942, the UN Information Office went to work and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) started planning for the eradication of hunger. Aside from the many backroom debates about the nature of the UN, the UN Relief and Rehabilitation Administration was created in 1943 (it then shut down operations in 1947). The International Labour Organization was revived in 1944, the same year that saw the Bretton Woods UN Monetary and Financial Conference that gave birth to the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund. The UN War Crimes Commission was a precursor to the Nuremberg and Tokyo trials. In a strange little twist of fate, one of the remaining utilities of the League of Nations was transferred to the United States in 1941. With the help of the Rockefeller Foundation, 12 key Secretariat members with their files and experience transferred to Princeton, New Jersey to take up residence in the Institute for Advanced Study where they advised on the post-war problems.

So, what was behind all this creative action? What did the leaders want out of the new United Nations? Needless to say, they all wanted an organization that was strong enough to promote international peace. In addition, Great Britain wanted to maintain its 'special relationship' with the US. It also believed that having the US and the Soviet Union in the new organization was more important than the exact form it would take. Joseph Stalin, the leader of the Soviet Union, wanted to maintain the alliance until he had time to rebuild his country. U.S. President Roosevelt had learnt from his 'New Deal' economic

development program that good politics went hand in hand with socio-economic programs. In the context of the UN, this meant that fostering post-war, international economic and social stability would make a contribution to maintaining peace and security. The massive unemployment following the First World War led to social unrest that was a harbinger of a new world conflict. The Americans thought it was crucial to prevent a renewed post-war economic slump by structuring an international bank and monetary fund to slay the triple-headed dragon of economic nationalism, speculative capital flows and trade barriers. To determine where they were heading, the Americans set up a top-secret 'Division of Special Research' as early as 1941 under Leo Pasvolksy, an aide to Secretary of State Cordell Hull, to plan a new permanent world organization.

The three major allies (Britain, the Soviet Union and the US) had differing ideas right up to the last minute, even concerning the actual nature of the new organization. Early on, they envisioned an international police force run by the three allies along with China. Another option considered was to set up a 'World Council' made up of three regional councils (Europe, the Americas and the Pacific). In the end, they agreed to some post-war structure that could more effectively manage conflicting interests and contain, at minimum, the threat of military and humanitarian disasters (Meacham 2003: 202-29).

By the Dumbarton Oaks conference in 1944 and the Yalta conference in 1945, the concept of the United Nations started to gel. The conversation shifted from regional councils and other proposals to planning for an organization that could exert force to try to maintain order, complete with a Security Council (with permanent members) and a General Assembly (ibid: 321).

It was decided that the UN would preside over a vast expansion of the social policy initiated by the League Secretariat, and that a voice would be given to the smaller nations under the leadership of the major powers. Churchill and Roosevelt sought to build institutions that would prevent the mistakes of the first half of the 20th century from repeating themselves in the second half. Nothing was left to chance as the Americans ramped up the promotion of the United Nations ideal using not only bipartisan political resolutions but advertisements, Hollywood showgirls, and musical anthems. On March 1, 1945, just weeks before his death, Roosevelt made a last plea for a global, rather than regional, organization. He told Congress that the UN agreements in Yalta "ought to spell the end of the system of unilateral action, the exclusive alliances, the spheres of influence, the balances of power, and all the other expedients that have been tried for centuries—and have always failed." (ibid: 321).

What we can see from all this is that states only began thinking about international institutions when they feared their interests or those of the world were in danger. It was major powers and their top leaders who set the rules, exploring numerous concepts and taking nothing for granted at the outset. Smaller countries were marginalized in processes that were neither inclusive nor

democratic. Concepts and details would be forged by some ‘secretariat’ in the background for debate by the leaders, who in turn would work through the issues and come to conclusions that shaped the future. This particular lesson should give us hope for change. As Plesch and Weiss concluded, “We thus should not act as if today’s international political order were immutable or pre-ordained. The 1940s should give us the courage to formulate ambitious visions about improving future world orders.” (2015: 203).

From the experience of these three international organizations we should recall the following:

- All resulted from efforts to create stability and peace after devastating wars;
- They also resulted from the evolution in international relations and the socio-economic context;
- All were dominated by the great powers of the period;
- Foreign relations are still masterminded by political elites with little democratic control;
- The right of international political intervention is still contested;
- All were torn by the contradictory desires for both cooperation and sovereign independence, and for equality but also leadership of the strong;
- States want the help of international organizations to smooth out their relationships—but these organizations are to be the creatures of the states and must not become too powerful or independent; and
- International organizations are not purely political creations; they also reflect their unique context.

Introducing the United Nations

The United Nations was founded at the San Francisco Conference in 1945 by delegates from 50 countries (Poland did not attend the Conference but signed the Declaration later that year, becoming an additional founding member). The overall design of the United Nations had much in common with its predecessor, reflecting how international institutions tend to evolve rather than change rapidly. Illustrating the continuity between the two organizations, few people even noticed that the United States joined the League *after* the Second World War, a year before it was legally wound up at a final ceremony in Geneva in 1946.

As with the League, the UN is based on a tripartite parliamentary structure including a Security Council (as a sort of Cabinet), a General Assembly or debating chamber with one vote for each state member but with few powers (sort of like legislatures), and an administrative Secretariat and secretary-general who, once again, is more secretary than general (a prototype of a public service). Likewise, the International Court of Justice in The Hague (replacing

the Permanent Court of International Justice) can only accept cases submitted to it by members and its decisions are more recommendations than orders. Also, the UN has no prosecutor, no police and no jail. And once again, although the UN Charter speaks glowingly of fundamental human rights and it gave birth to the Universal Charter of Human Rights, there are no binding obligations that commit members to protect citizens—even if they sign treaties to do so.

There are also significant differences between the League and the UN. The very powerful Security Council was designed to take action whenever its members are in agreement. Vetoes were accorded to the Great Powers (the Permanent Five members) to make sure they do not have to leave the UN to protect their interests—which was one of the downfalls of the League and something we must remember when we discuss criticisms of the veto later. No other members were given veto power with which to block action, so there is no proto-anarchy as in the League. The Security Council is given exclusive jurisdiction over maintaining peace and security. Various chapters of the Charter give the Council graduated powers to enforce the peace, starting with investigations and moving on to negotiations, sanctions and eventually a possible call on all countries to protect the peace of the world. There were also provisions for armed forces and a command system, but when the Cold War started soon after the founding of the UN, these were never acted upon.

Another new feature was the Economic and Social Council, which was intended to spearhead much broader development and cooperation of experts than imagined under the League. As we saw, because of his experience with the New Deal to help overcome the worst aspects of the Great Depression, this had become one of President Roosevelt's main goals. Thus, the UN combines humanitarian technocracy to promote economic and social development with the powerful potential of the Great Powers to protect the peace whenever they can jointly decide to do so. After more than 70 years, it can be claimed that the UN has kept the major powers together—and talking, not fighting. Some say it was the rebirth of the League, only with more teeth and with the participation of the United States.

The principal organs of the United Nations

The Security Council

The Security Council is formed of five Permanent Members (the P5) wielding vetoes (the United States, Great Britain, France, Russia and China—the victors in the Second World War) plus, currently, 10 other rotating members elected by the General Assembly for two-year terms. It is the UN's most powerful

forum. The rotating members represent the various regions of the world. Each member has one vote. Procedural matters require nine votes. Substantive matters require nine votes and the absence of a veto. Thus, in theory the rotating members have a negative or blocking vote for stopping things from happening—it is sometimes referred to as the ‘sixth veto’. The presidency of the Council rotates monthly among its members.

The Council bears the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Linda Fasulo has provided an excellent word portrait of its powers: “It has the authority to examine any conflict or dispute that might have international repercussions and to decide matters affecting the fate of governments, establish peacekeeping missions, create tribunals to try persons accused of war crimes, apply economic sanctions to misbehaving governments, and in extreme cases declare a nation to be fair game for corrective action by other member states. It is the only UN principal organ whose resolutions are binding on member states, which means that governments do not have the option of choosing which of the council’s decisions they will or will not accept and help implement.” (2015: 55).

The role of the UN in peacekeeping and peace enforcement (under Charter Chapter VII: ‘Action with regard to threats to peace’) has increased immeasurably since the first United Nations Emergency Force was deployed for the Suez crisis of 1956. The UN went from modest monitoring and supervision operations in the 1940s, to now supervising more troops in the field (contributed by members) than any country. By 2016, there were 16 UN-led missions in the field for an annual cost of some \$8.2 billion (on top of the regular UN budget). They include large civilian and police components. In the post-Cold War period after 1990, the P5 in the Security Council were much more cooperative and were willing to tackle more numerous and diverse conflicts including domestic rivalries. Often this has led to a need to work cooperatively with regional partners in ‘coalitions of the willing’ from such groups as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union, West African States and the African Union. The Security Council now goes well beyond pure peacemaking to work toward peacebuilding with the monitoring of elections and long-term international support for the development of institutions and finances. There has also been a reinforcement of combatting terrorist threats.

Aside from peacekeeping, the Security Council has at its disposal a whole series of measures it can use to try to change the orientation of ‘misbehaving’ states. One of the most dramatic forms of influence is sanctions that can be used to restrict the movement of finances, weapons, trade, travel or diplomatic contacts. As will be discussed in the following chapter, sanctions have become more targeted and efficient over the years in response to criticism and there have been several examples of successful use.

The number of formal and informal meetings of the Security Council has fluctuated over the years. For instance, there were 117 in 1988 and 373 in 2012. Under pressure from Canada and other members, the Council has slowly evolved to a more open process beyond the meetings of diplomats of its 15 members. It now invites non-members, UN officials and agencies, and even international NGOs. It also consults with states making major contributions to peacekeeping and other UN operations. The Council has also established some 40 subsidiary bodies to monitor specific places or issues. Over the years, the Security Council's agenda has broadened to include not only peacekeeping but also humanitarian concerns, the international right to intervene, the plight of war induced refugees, monitoring of elections, post-conflict peacebuilding, terrorism and the creation of international criminal tribunals.

The question of the veto power afforded to the Permanent Five is highly significant both for the nature of the UN and its future. The major victorious powers insisted on having a veto in the new international organization in order to protect their 'vital interests'. Other states went along with it to ensure the presence of the major players and make sure they did not leave at the first hiccup. However, it was never thought the P5 would use the veto or the threat of a veto to cover their whole foreign policy, as has often been the case, most recently with Syria.

Russia has long considered Syria to be in its 'sphere of influence'. China on the other hand has no clear connection with the Middle East. Yet both have used their veto power to block resolutions to halt the Syrian civil war, on the basis that *may* interfere in their internal affairs or *may* establish a principle or a pretext for such intervention. In particular, they fear the aggressive overreach of the 'Western powers' (the US, Western Europe, and their NATO allies). In 2007, Russia and China accepted that NATO, on behalf of the UN, could use the Responsibility to Protect norm to authorize air support to protect the civilians and the rebels against Gaddafi in Libya. Western powers went far beyond this mandate though, by instituting a complete regime change. So, Russia and China feared that even having the Security Council authorize 'no-fly' zones over Syria would be the thin-edge-of-the-wedge to permit the complete overthrow of the Assad regime. They considered that stopping such a precedent for intervention in domestic affairs is vital to their interests and worthy of a veto—however hard it is for the rest of the world to understand because it permitted this deadly war to continue for six years.

Given this situation, many critics have called for the complete abolition of vetoes in the UN. Meanwhile, those who think the P5 will never let go of their advantage propose that the world work toward a curtailment of the veto so that its use would exclude resolutions dealing with war crimes and be limited strictly to resolutions directly affecting the vital interests of a P5 state.

Another basic problem with the current Security Council is that it is not representative of the world to which it is supposed to give leadership. This has

led to calls for the expansion of its membership, for which there has already been a precedent in 1965 (one of the few amendments of the UN Charter). However, this too is deeply political and the debate has been ongoing for decades. Various proposals for reforming the Security Council, specifically those dealing with the issue of representation, are discussed in Chapters 2 and 5.

In sum, the Security Council can be very effective at protecting international peace and security when its members are able to work together. Since the end of the Cold War, it has proved influential and even transformative as it has asserted the UN's responsibility to intervene, even in internal conflicts. Yet it has crucial shortcomings, including its occasional failure to act, its unrepresentative nature and its two-tier membership of permanent and non-permanent members.

The General Assembly

The General Assembly (GA) is the main deliberative organ of the United Nations. It is composed of one representative from each member state, each of which has one vote. It is sort of like the UN's legislature where all the general debates are held. The significance of having all 193 member states debating together in one place for three months of the year (September to December)—and on 24-hour call the rest of the time—cannot be over-emphasized. Whether they like it or not, they are learning to apply the rules of international law, diplomacy and even democracy. They practice getting along and listening to one another. They learn to live by the rules of the game—and, indeed, determine what the rules of the game are. They learn to persuade rather than to fight. This is no small matter when you consider the UN has grown from 51 members when it was founded in 1945 to 193 members by 2011 (the year that the last new member, South Sudan, joined). Thus, the GA is a cornerstone institution which demonstrates the UN's distinctive universality—the very thing from which it derives its legitimacy. That may be why so many heads of state turn up for its annual general debate each September, which symbolizes the UN's convening power. Together, the above attributes define what is called the principle of 'multilateralism'. Nonetheless, we have to recognize that since the 1980s, the Assembly has been largely eclipsed by the more active Security Council and by the fact that major states have turned to institutions or grouping such as the World Bank and the Group of 20 to manage international economic relations.

Article 11 of the UN Charter authorizes the General Assembly to "consider" and "discuss" peace and security and "make recommendations" to members, except on issues being considered by the Security Council, to which it must also refer questions of "action". Article 13 spells out the GA's main fields of competence. It shall initiate studies and make recommendations for political

cooperation, development of international law, and promoting international cooperation in the “economic, social, cultural, educational and health fields”, as well as assist in the realization of “human rights and fundamental freedoms”. Often fundamental developments can take a long time. For instance, the Maltese ambassador’s well-known speech in 1967, which called for international regulations relating to the sea and proposing that the seabed and its resources were the “common heritage of mankind”, was just the start of a 15-year long debate that eventually led to the Law of the Sea. Even so, we should note that it is often the bilateral and multilateral discussions that go on outside the formal debates that make the more significant contribution to the peaceful unfolding of world affairs.

The Assembly elects a new president each year as well as 21 vice-presidents and the heads of its six Main Committees. Anyone can become involved. Whether countries are small, medium or large, the Assembly tends to give as many delegates as possible some position of responsibility—with attendant recognition and rewards. Yet not all relations are cozy. Power has shifted in the Assembly since 1945 as the regional distribution of states has changed. From the UN’s inception to the present day, the number of African states has increased from 3 to 54, those of Asia have risen from 9 to 53, while those of the West and Latin America have only doubled, from 39 to 85. The GA is riven by all sorts of groupings, mainly regional and the North–South split but also historical (the British Commonwealth) and cultural/linguistic (Spanish, French, Arab, etc.).

The two major blocs representing the ‘developing countries’ of the ‘South’ are the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) with its 114 members and the Group of 77 with 133 members—many of them overlapping. The NAM was formed during the Cold War as a home for those who did not simply want to be swept up in the Communist–Capitalist divide. The G77 was founded several years later in 1964 to coordinate the position of developing countries on trade and development and to help them get a better collective grip on international trade and finance. Together they work to defend the General Assembly against what they perceive to be US dominance and attempts by the Great Powers to marginalize them. Some see the NAM as a holdover generally used to oppose the United States. Nonetheless, it is claimed that the Third World majority was hobbled by the fact that its majority inside the Assembly is not paralleled by resources for action outside. This highlights the GA’s weakness as a deliberative body without effective administrative and coercive capabilities. This is in addition to the fact that the blocs tend to slow the process and bring decisions down to the ‘lowest common denominator’—all of which underlies the tendency to want to boot all the action up to the Security Council.

The General Assembly’s recommendations or “resolutions” are only binding when they apply to the UN’s internal operations such as budget and membership matters. It elects the rotating members of the Security Council and the

Economic and Social Council, and, along with the Security Council, it elects the judges of the International Court of Justice. It appoints the secretary-general on the recommendation of the Security Council.

The Assembly's current agenda runs to some 175 items arrayed across nine broad categories. To get through the agenda, the GA relies on its committee system to examine issues and propose solutions. There is a General Committee, a Credentials Committee and six Main Committees (see Box 3).

Box 3: The General Assembly's six Main Committees

First Committee – Disarmament and National Security

Second Committee – Economic and Financial

Third Committee – Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

Fourth Committee – Special Political and Decolonization

Fifth Committee – Administrative and Budgetary

Sixth Committee – Legal

Although these committees handle discussion of the main issues before the UN, the actual agenda reflects the more day-to-day workings of the world such as sustained economic growth and sustainable development; drug control, crime prevention and combating terrorism; disarmament; and maintenance of international peace and security. As can be imagined, each of these items has many subsections.

One of the main functions of the General Assembly is as a repository for international treaty making. Much international, multilateral activity and international law is treaty based. Treaties are also called covenants. The United Nations itself is essentially a treaty among all its state members (through the Charter). A member state becomes 'party' to a treaty by formally 'consenting to be bound' by its terms, usually via 'ratification' of the treaty by its legislature. Each treaty sets out a minimum number of states that must ratify it for it to become international law by which its signatories are bound. Later, other states may accede to the treaty/convention. An oversight committee is often established as a 'convention secretariat' to monitor the implementation of the treaty.

The most significant criticism of the General Assembly is that it does not represent the world effectively. With the GA's 'one member, one vote' policy, China gets the same representation as Malta. In 2013, 39 member states had populations under one million and 13 had populations under 100,000. The 65 least populated member states could together block a two-thirds majority vote, despite comprising less than 1 per cent of the total population of all member nations. And, theoretically, the 128 least populated members—which account

for less than 8.5 per cent of humanity and collectively pay under 1.3 per cent of the total UN budget—could provide the two-thirds majority required to adopt a resolution (Schwartzberg 2013: 19-20). In other words, the power in the General Assembly is skewed *away from* the largest states. As Schwartzberg concludes from these figures, “If one is to oppose—quite rightly—the undemocratic veto by any one of the five strong nations with permanent membership in the SC, one should also oppose unwarranted exercises of political power by GA coalitions of the very weak.” (ibid: 20).

There are also criticisms of the GA’s ineffectual processes. It is accused of debating minutiae and of being unable to reach closure on issues that squander its prestige. Past secretaries-general have noted its need to streamline procedures and structures. In fact, most of the largest countries have ‘voted with their feet’ and fled the UN to work through the more restrained membership of the G7 and the G20. To overcome these deficiencies there are proposals for ‘weighted voting’ that would combine a country’s population and economic contributions with its vote as a state (see Schwartzberg 2013). It is certainly clear that reforms are needed to attract the important players to reconsider the United Nations as an effective forum of global decision-making.

The Economic and Social Council

ECOSOC is the acronym used to refer to the third principal organ of the UN, the Economic and Social Council. Its primary functions are to be a central forum for discussing economic, social and environmental issues, to formulate policy recommendations for states and the UN, and to integrate the three pillars of sustainable development. The UN Charter spells out both its policy and advocacy roles, stating that it may make or initiate studies with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, and health matters, as well as human rights; make policy recommendations to the General Assembly; and convene conferences. It is also responsible for coordinating the work of UN agencies (e.g., UNICEF, UNESCO) in these fields and is the intermediary between the GA and the more than 30,000 NGOs doing development work and humanitarian advocacy (including the approximately 4,000 that have consultative status with ECOSOC).

The Council’s current 54 members, elected by the General Assembly on a geographical basis, serve three year terms. They elect their own president and four vice-presidents every year. Decisions are by majority vote with each member having one vote. It holds preparatory meetings along with relevant NGOs and then holds a four-week substantive session in July, alternating between New York and Geneva. This session includes a high-level segment that cabinet ministers and other officials are meant to attend. The Council is intended to coordinate the work of UN programmes and funds, and specialized

agencies. The year-round work of ECOSOC is carried out by its subsidiary and related bodies including: eight functional commissions (statistics, population, social development, women, narcotics, crime, science and technology, and forests and sustainable development—now a high-level political forum); five regional commissions (Africa, Asia-Pacific, Europe, Latin America and Caribbean, and Western Asia); three standing administrative committees; a Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues; and a number of expert bodies (for instance on tax matters and transport of dangerous goods).

ECOSOC has long been criticized for its ineffectiveness. There have been many efforts to reform it over the decades, and yet it is perhaps the organ that has shown the least amount of change. Its difficulties stem from a host of reasons. First, its responsibilities and functions often overlap with those of the General Assembly. Although the Charter elevates ECOSOC to the rank of a principal organ, it also clearly places it under the authority of the GA. As we saw above, the Second Committee of the GA deals with economic and financial matters, while the Third Committee's mandate covers the social, humanitarian and cultural fields. On top of this duplication, the Assembly has the advantage of being the UN's foremost plenary debating society where everyone has a voice, while ECOSOC is one-quarter its size.

Second, many large countries, particularly Western, industrialized nations, have long sought to limit the UN's voice when it comes to the international economy. They certainly do not want the UN to be the central forum for debating and coordinating economic policy. Nor do they want to be held hostage to listening to the grievances of the scores of small and poor developing countries that dominate the General Assembly and ECOSOC. This sheds light on why, at the creation of the UN, the Great Powers shovelled the serious economic matters to the independent World Bank and International Monetary Fund where they not only control the agenda but also nominate leaders. This was part of a long process of diverting the UN away from macro-economic policy-making and toward development assistance. More recently, the wealthiest countries have fled the UN in the direction of the G7 and the G20 to discuss economic matters.

Third, in order to promote decentralization, the founders of the UN endowed the 14 Specialized Agencies with their own governing apparatus. Each one reports to its own state authorities. The result is that they have never felt compelled to want to be 'coordinated' by ECOSOC. As if these fundamental problems were not enough, the very ponderous nature of ECOSOC also dooms it to irrelevance. Its 54 members are too numerous to be decisive and too few to have the attraction of the General Assembly. Its processes and meetings are too cumbersome to attract powerful ministers and to deal with emergency issues when the UN really needs to be active.

ECOSOC has been adorned with such adjectives as 'fuzzy', 'powerless' and 'lacking a clear identity'. Proposed reforms have run into the opposition of

foreign ministries of powerful countries, the General Assembly or the Security Council. So, ECOSOC continues to limp along helping to advance programs for development and technical matters. It does now meet with the international financial institutions and interacts with the Security Council, but the issues of its ambiguous relations with the General Assembly, the non-binding nature of its decisions and its composition remain to be solved. Chapter 3 will explore some past attempts at reform, as well as ideas put forward by experts to transform ECOSOC into a workable institution.

Trusteeship Council

There is an additional, little known principal organ of the UN, now in disuse. It is the Trusteeship Council, originally created in 1945 to administer and supervise the 80 countries still under colonial jurisdiction while on their path to independence under the guidance of the UN. Palau, a small island group in the Pacific, was the last trust territory before becoming a UN member in 1994. Despite considerable thought and effort by Secretary-General Kofi Annan, a majority could never be rallied behind any of the propositions for an amendment to the Charter to change the Council's vocation (e.g., to be an environmental council). Hence, the Trusteeship Council simply suspended operations in 1994 and ceased to exist except on paper. This story demonstrates that the founders of the UN could not foresee every eventuality. It also illustrates how difficult it would be to amend the Charter, even when there is relative consensus on non-threatening modifications to better reflect the current reality. Despite the hurdles that would need to be overcome, the former Trusteeship Council is available to be used for some new purpose.

The International Court of Justice

The International Court of Justice (ICJ), founded in 1946 as part of the Charter, is the principal judicial organ of the United Nations. Located in The Hague (the Netherlands), it is the only one of the six principal organs not located in New York. Also known as the 'World Court', it is the only court of a universal character with general jurisdiction. Its first role is to settle legal disputes submitted by states in accordance with international law (see Box 4). There are more than 180,000 inter-state treaties in the UN registry and over 500 major multilateral treaties, for which the secretary-general is the repository. ICJ judgements have binding force for the parties concerned and are without appeal. Second, the Court gives advisory opinions on legal questions referred by UN organs and agencies.

Box 4: Understanding ‘international law’

In general, international law includes duly ratified international treaties and conventions, decisions of the Security Council, international custom, the general principles of law, and, in a subsidiary manner, previous judicial decisions and the teachings of the most notable international law experts. In a broader sense, ‘soft-law’ may include declarations, statements, and plans of action agreed to by signatory countries or international conferences. Together they provide the norms of international law, but not the coordinating framework for an international legal regime.

The International Law Commission was established by the General Assembly in 1947 to promote the progressive development of international law and its codification. A major part of their work is preparing drafts of aspects of international law and submitting them to the GA. The GA may then convene a conference to incorporate the draft into a convention, open to states to become parties if they agree to be bound by its provisions. Some regulate relations between states such as the Conventions on Diplomatic Relations, Consular Relations and the Law of Treaties. There are also a number of extensive bodies of law such as International Trade Law and Environmental Law. One of the world’s most comprehensive instruments is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, with its 320 articles and nine annexes. It is now universally accepted that all activities and resources in the oceans and seas are governed by the Convention, with its 165 states parties. For instance, there is general acceptance of 12 nautical miles as the limit of a country’s territorial sea and also of an exclusive economic zone and also continental shelf zone up to 200 miles. The Convention has also brought stability to navigation, establishing the right of innocent passage in territorial waters, transit passage in narrow straits, and freedom of navigation in the exclusive economic zone.

The ICJ has delivered fewer than 100 judgements on cases running from boundaries and sovereignty to violations of humanitarian law and diplomatic disputes. It has also rendered 27 advisory opinions. Thus, the Court is not exactly over-worked. This is in part because only member states can submit disputes (no individual or other international actor can bring a case forward) and states must bind themselves in advance to accept the ruling. The ICJ is not a ‘constitutional court’ for the UN system and has no legal review of decisions. There is also little power of enforcement.

The International Court of Justice is now buttressed by the International Criminal Court (ICC), an independent permanent court founded by the Rome Statute in 1998 and entered into force in 2002. By 2013 it had been ratified by 122 states parties. It tries persons accused of ‘international crimes’: genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. We include it here for completeness; however, it is not part of the United Nations. Its creation was facilitated by the

UN and cooperation between the ICC and the UN is governed by a ‘negotiated relationship agreement’. The Security Council can refer cases to it. The ICC is discussed in further detail in Chapter 4.

In its attempts to expand international humanitarian law, the Security Council also established the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia (1993) and for Rwanda (1994) and supported the special courts for Sierra Leone (2002), Cambodia (2006) and Lebanon (2007). These are sometimes referred to as ‘hybrid courts’, which cease to exist once all cases have been heard.

The Secretariat

The Secretariat includes all departments and offices that develop policy and administer the UN. It is the head and the heart of the international organization. Despite continuous accusations of a ‘huge bureaucracy’ from enemies of the UN, the reality is that there are only around 40,000 staff (as of June 2016), comparable to the personnel of some municipalities and indeed less than that of the New York City police and fire departments. Of these, roughly half are located in the field; the remaining half are based out of cities where the Secretariat has a presence, mainly New York where it is headquartered but also Geneva, Vienna, Nairobi and others. The Secretariat services the other principal organs and administers the programs and policies they establish. The duties carried out by the Secretariat include: peacekeeping administration, mediation of international disputes, organizing humanitarian programs, surveying economic and social trends, studies on human rights and sustainable development, and promoting international agreements. It also has the task of developing public information and organizing international conferences.

The list of departments and offices within the Secretariat (see Figure 2) shows the immense scope of UN activities. In addition to the diverse responsibilities listed above, it must also stay abreast of current affairs, whether related to economic and social affairs, peacekeeping or human rights. Given the ‘globalization of everything’, from financial instability to the movement of people, this is no easy task. To finance its work, the Secretariat’s 2016-2017 budget was approximately \$2.4 billion—about half the UN’s total biennium budget for these two years. To secure the human and financial resources to carry out its responsibilities, the secretary-general and his assistants must continually bargain, negotiate and ‘beg, borrow and steal’ with the member states and, to a lesser extent, the corporate sector.

It can be said that over time the Secretariat has been as well run as any bureaucracy. In response to multiple criticisms (especially from the Americans), it has been studied, restructured and seen its budget and personnel reduced many times. For instance, in 1997-98 Kofi Annan brought together some

thirty departments, funds and programmes into four executive groups for Development; Political and Security Affairs; Humanitarian Affairs; and Human Rights—a basic model which is still adhered to. New safeguards on spending and corruption are continually instituted.

The real problem with the Secretariat lies in the refusal of nation-states to allow it to be a fully meritocratic international public service as was originally tried with some success under the League of Nations. Everyone, the major powers included, has reasons for wanting to control the secretariat—or not wanting someone else to do so. In 1945 it was intended in Charter Articles 100 and 101 that staff members would be independent of any government. Article 100 enunciated the principle of an independent, international civil service and Article 101 spelled out the overriding values of the “highest standards of efficiency, competence and integrity”. But under pressure from the Soviet Union, a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ was reached in London in 1946 and the five permanent members were ‘assigned’ major departments of the Secretariat. This was the beginning of the seesaw battle that has continued ever since between those who want a professional and independent public service and those who want to place their nationals in strategic positions. The latter have been winning. Reinforced by demands for ‘geographical distribution’, there has been a growing politicization of the Secretariat over the years and often poor management, lack of accountability and cronyism. Staff members have also complained about poor administrative justice in the Secretariat (Jonah 2007: 165).

Beyond the organs

The Secretary-General

“There are limits to what the Secretary-General can do... Multilateral institutions (such as the UN) are conditioned by changing international power configurations, and by conflicts that exist within the broader international system” Edward Newman (2007: 189)

Active and skilful secretaries-general such as Dag Hammarskjöld and Kofi Annan have managed to transform a rather benign position into a “symbol of the United Nation’s ideals and a spokesperson for the interests of the world’s peoples” (UN Information Service). The secretary-general is named by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council for a term of five years. Almost all have completed two terms (see Box 5 for the complete list of past SGs). The description of the position in the Charter is very skimpy. It says little more than, “he shall be the chief administrative officer of the Organization” (UN Charter, Article 97). The UN’s description of the position is a little clearer, stating that the secretary-general “establishes general policies

and provides overall guidance to the organization and is in equal parts diplomat and advocate, civil servant and chief executive officer” (Basic Facts about the UN 2014: 17). Tradition has it that the founders expected the SG to be more secretary than general. Nevertheless, the world expects him to ‘speak truth to power’ by telling “the Security Council what it has to know, not what it wants to hear”, as Michael Sheehan, former assistant secretary-general for peace-keeping, put it (Fasulo 2015: 27). In fact, the most significant function of the SG is to make the Council aware of any impending dangers to peace and security.

Box 5: Secretaries-General, 1945-present

Trygve Lie (Norway)	1946-1952
Dag Hammarskjöld (Sweden)	1953-1961
U Thant (Burma)	1961-1971
Kurt Waldheim (Austria)	1972-1981
Javier Pérez de Cuellar (Peru)	1982-1991
Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Egypt)	1992-1996
Kofi Annan (Ghana)	1997-2006
Ban Ki-moon (South Korea)	2007-2016
Antonio Guterres (Portugal)	2017-

The SG also chairs the Chief Executives Board of the UN system including all the funds, programmes and agencies, and the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. This is as close as the UN gets to coordination. Traditionally the SGs have rotated among the world’s regions. All have been men, but the calls for a woman head of the UN have become louder.

Needless to say, the secretary-general cannot do everything him or herself. The SG is surrounded by 15 under-secretaries-general who manage the various departments of the Secretariat. Since 1998, the SG has also been seconded by a deputy secretary-general to help with the administrative burden and special activities. To help carry out the secretary-general’s all-important use of his ‘good offices’ (negotiation, mediation, conflict prevention, public relations, arm twisting in public and private, etc.), the SG can name special and personal representatives and envoys, including ‘Messengers of Peace’ and ‘Goodwill Ambassadors’. Each secretary-general also must focus the UN’s activities dependent on the international context. For example, Ban Ki-moon’s focus for his second term from 2012 to 2016 included sustainable development, climate change, prevention of natural disasters, armed conflict, human rights abuses, a more secure world, nations in transition, and women and youth.

One analyst has summed up very well the complexities of the secretary-general's position. "Without the traditional levers of power, the Secretary-General can nevertheless wield real influence in international politics through the use of moral suasion and his authority as the embodiment of the 'international community'. However, this is always within the context of an organization controlled by member states which have as their primary concern their national interests." (Newman 2007: 175).

Given the significance of the secretary-general's position, there have always been debates over the scope of its powers and the mode of nomination. The nomination comes from the Security Council, which essentially means those states which can veto any proposal (the Permanent Five members, though in effect just the largest—the United States, China and Russia). There has been no openness, foresight or planning. Critics have long called for a serious selection process with specified qualifications, an extended search, rules for nomination, a timetable for discussion and a single seven-year term to avoid politicking. Thanks to the 1 for 7 Billion campaign led by the World Federalists Movement and the British United Nations Association, the Security Council finally relented in 2015 and gave the critics half a cake. It was decided that while the method of selection would go according to tradition, there would be an open nomination process for all countries and candidates would make their case to the General Assembly. There were 10 official candidates in the 2016 selection for the next secretary-general. Half the candidates were women, following significant pressure for a woman to hold the top post. The entire process was more transparent than it had been in the past, with public dialogue and televised debates. But the single nomination still came from the Security Council, and it was done in secret.

The candidate finally chosen by the Security Council and elected by the General Assembly was Antonio Guterres. Mr. Guterres served as Prime Minister of Portugal (1995-2002) and as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees for two mandates (2005-2015). He was known at the UN for maintaining good relations with member states, civil society and the private sector. He also reformed and innovated in his Office while minimizing its costs.

In his 'vision statement' presented to the General Assembly in April 2016, Antonio Guterres summarized his intended priorities for the coming years. He spoke to the need for new approaches to deal with the challenges of our time, which include inequality, exclusion and the changing nature of conflict. He envisioned a UN that is able to 'connect the dots' through a holistic approach that effectively links the three pillars of peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. To achieve this, Guterres highlighted the importance of reforming the UN Development System, mainstreaming both human rights and gender equality across the whole UN system, and implementing the Agenda 2030, the Paris Climate Agreement, and the Addis Ababa Action Agenda. He went on to emphasize the centrality of prevention in ensuring

peace and security, and specifically the need for diplomacy, the participation of women and institution building. Reform and innovation, focused on delivery and results, is another key priority outlined. He stated his view that reform is not a onetime action but a permanent attitude, and that efforts should centre on being less bureaucratic and more productive, efficient and field oriented. Finally, he called for strong partnerships with regional organizations, the international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector.

UN budgets

The United Nations General Assembly approved a two-year UN budget of \$5.4 billion for 2016-2017, down 1 per cent from the total spending during the previous two years. The new biennial budget includes a 2 per cent staffing cut, or some 221 posts, and a one-year freeze in staff compensation. This is not the first time there has been a decrease in the UN budget. In fact, the organization is almost always held on a short financial leash by member states. Many critics believe the endemic underfunding of the UN is its most crucial problem. On the other hand, many members, led by the United States, have over the years accused the Secretariat of being a bloated bureaucracy and profligate spender—whether this be a gross exaggeration or not.

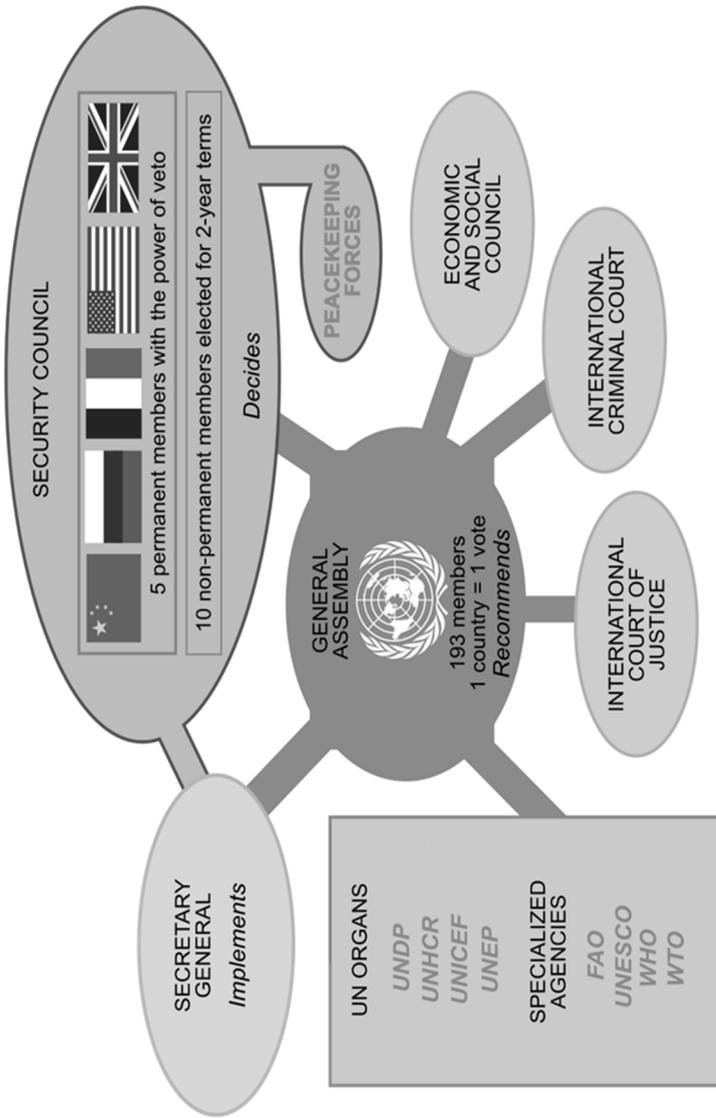
As in past years, the biennial budget negotiations were marked by a tussle between poor countries seeking to increase the UN development spending, and major developed countries, the biggest budget contributors, trying to rein in the figures as they struggle to reduce expenditures in their own national budgets.

The so-called core UN budget that was adopted does not include peacekeeping, currently running at over \$8 billion a year and approved in separate negotiations. Noteworthy is the fact that the total peacekeeping budget represents less than half of one per cent of annual world military spending, estimated at \$1.7 trillion in 2016, or 2.3 per cent of world gross domestic product (GDP). Nor does the core budget cover the costs of the UN tribunals. Both the peacekeeping and the tribunals are covered by payments assessed by the Assembly, mainly among the wealthier countries. The individual budgets of the major UN agencies and programmes (such as UNICEF, UNHCR, UNDP, UNESCO and WHO) are funded by voluntary contributions from member states.

The UN System

Technically speaking, the ‘United Nations System’ is formed of the UN family of organizations that includes the principal organs, the United Nations programmes and funds, the specialized agencies and other related organizations (although many of us do use the term UN System more loosely to refer to all

Figure 2: The United Nations System diagram



Source: United Nations

organisms related to the UN). Programmes, funds and offices are subsidiary bodies of the General Assembly. On the other hand, the specialized agencies are independent but are linked to the UN through individual agreements and report to ECOSOC and/or the Assembly. There is also a difference in funding. While all subsist on chronically inadequate voluntary contributions from member countries, the specialized agencies also receive contributions from the overall UN budget. The International Atomic Energy Agency and the World Trade Organization are considered to be 'related organizations' with their own legislative bodies. As we just saw, an attempt to coordinate the UN system is made by the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination. With its 29 members and chaired by the Secretary-General, it meets twice a year.

The need for better coordination across the system has been an issue for decades. In fact, in their analysis of the lack of institutional coherence of the UN system, Childers and Urquhart concluded that the founders understood from the outset that a loose assemblage of agencies could not provide adequate governance. Recognizing this, the founders had specifically designed linkages that could make a loose collection of organizations work. From the outset it was intended that the UN would be the authoritative hub "able to forge coordinated strategies" (1994: 40), while the specialized agencies (by signed legal agreements under Articles 57, 58 and 63 of the Charter) were meant to have their objectives coordinated along with varying degrees of administrative harmonization and coherence. Yet these were never implemented. Moreover, while it was deliberate that specialized agencies would have their own separate legal existence and secretariats (so that politicians and diplomats could not hinder progress on specialized and technical matters), it was never envisaged that the agencies would grab the degree of separateness that has become one of the system's chief weaknesses.

As the authors deduce, "There is no intergovernmental assembly or council of the UN system as a whole." (ibid: 31). Now we see why so many 'reformers' are turning to a restructured ECOSOC as the potential new central pillar for economic, social and environmental policy cohesion.

International financial institutions and other international actors

The two major international financial institutions, the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, are in a class apart. Founded at the Bretton Woods Conference in 1944, they are also known as the Bretton Woods institutions. Although they are completely independent, they are considered to be two of the 15 Specialized Agencies of the United Nations with which they maintain formal relations through the Chief Executives Board for Coordination. However, the founders of the UN specifically separated these two major

financial institutions from the rest of the UN, presumably to reduce political interference and provide for shareholder governance as described below.

The World Bank Group evolved from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (that facilitated post-Second World War reconstruction) to today's five financial institutions with a mandate to provide financing and technical assistance for worldwide poverty alleviation. The five institutions are: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the International Development Association, the International Finance Corporation, the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency and the International Centre for Settlement of Investment Disputes.

In 2016, the World Bank Group provided \$64.2 billion for financial and technical assistance to developing countries around the world, making it one of the largest sources of such financing. This assistance supports a wide array of investments in such areas as education, health, public administration, infrastructure, financial and private sector development, agriculture, and environmental and natural resource management. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) makes loans for development projects to governments of middle income and creditworthy low-income countries; in 2016 it made new commitments of \$29.7 billion in 114 operations. The International Development Association (IDA) provides interest free loans (called credits) and grants to governments of the poorest countries with terms varying from 25 to 38 years. It made new commitments of \$16.2 billion in 162 operations in 2016. Together, IBRD and IDA make up "the World Bank" (as opposed to "the World Bank Group" which consists of all five institutions).

The primary purpose of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is to ensure the stability of the international monetary system—the system of exchange rates and international payments that enables countries to transact with each other. It does so in three ways: keeping track of the global economy and the economies of member countries; lending to countries with balance of payments difficulties; and giving practical help to members. For instance, along with European banks, it was the major lender to help Greece out of its troubles in 2014. The Fund's mandate was updated in 2012 to include all macroeconomic and financial sector issues that bear on global stability. Since the global economic crisis in 2009, it has also strengthened its support for low-income countries to respond to changing economic conditions and their increased vulnerabilities.

For both the Bank and the IMF, the 189 member countries subscribe funds according to their economic strength. Voting power is linked to the level of subscription. While the voting shares vary by organization, the US, Japan, Germany, France and Great Britain control roughly 35 per cent of the votes. Each member country appoints one governor and one alternate to the Boards of Governors, which meet annually. The governors are usually ministers of finance or governors of a central bank. Traditionally, the President of the World Bank has been American while the Managing Director of the IMF has been European.

However, the IMF has moved toward an open, merit based process for selection of the Managing Director in 2011 and the World Bank is likely to follow.

The international financial institutions do more than provide loans and regulate the international economy. They also impose conditions. Starting in the late 1980s, what was called the 'Washington Consensus' promoted neo-liberal rules to reduce the role of governments in the economy and increase the role of market forces. The World Bank and IMF were able to promote that view throughout the developing world by attaching policy conditions to the major loans they made for budgetary support. Countries were obliged to cut public spending, eliminate subsidies, and privatize state-owned industries. Later in the 1990s this was described under the banner of 'good governance' and included democratization and transparency. As time went on it was recognized that these policies often spawned more poverty in developing countries and more foreign ownership. Government fiscal restraint sometimes made national financial emergencies worse rather than better.

Founded in 1995, the World Trade Organization (WTO) is a successor to the post-war General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Over 50 years, the GATT successfully cut tariff protection by more than half among member states, but it had several perceived weaknesses. Formal disputes among members, for instance, relied on the consent of all parties, including the defendant, to proceed. Countries could simply block proceedings against themselves, though, interestingly, they rarely did. Yet the WTO is a comparatively far more legalistic institution. It also has a broader scope, encompassing issues such as health and safety measures, and intellectual property. Like the GATT, the WTO continues to operate by a consensus voting rule. Combined with its large membership, which counts 164 members as of 2016, this consensus rule has been faulted by many for the institution's current stalemate: its last negotiation round, the Doha Round, has been stalled for over a decade. Yet one aspect of the institution, its dispute settlement function, continues to thrive. Among international courts, it stands out by its large caseload, with over 500 disputes filed, its high level of compliance with its rulings, and the consistency of its jurisprudence. Insofar as countries continue to liberalize trade under the WTO's auspices, it is through the continuous clarification of their obligations that occurs with the settlement of formal disputes. Although it is not a formal part of the UN, the WTO maintains regular relations with parts of the UN system.

The rise of other international actors cannot be ignored (see Box 6). Enumerated here are those that are now generally accepted in the international relations literature but we must keep our eyes open for powerful new partners on the global stage.

Box 6: Other ‘actors’ enter the world stage

The term ‘actors’, as it is used here, refers to groups which have a significant enough influence on international politics that they must be taken into consideration both by other players and by analysts. Up until the 1980s and 90s it was generally agreed the only influential actors in international politics were nations states and their creatures like the United Nations and other international organizations. One of the major changes in international politics is the presence of new actors which cannot be ignored. These, in particular, include civil society, in the form of NGOs, and the private sector represented by multinational corporations—but also the media, religious groups, regional actors, and major cities.

Civil society, which is considered the “third sector” of society, distinct from government and business, comprises NGOs, social movements, religious institutions, academics, unions and all other non-state organizations and institutions that promote the interests of citizens. A recent count placed the number of NGOs at more than 50,000; most created since the 1980s and 90s. Some NGOs have more resources than even UN agencies. Civil society is most effective when its members come together in what are called ‘campaign coalitions’ to influence major international decisions, such as the creation of the International Criminal Court, the ban on landmines, and R2P. It derives its strength, in great part, from having come to represent democratic forces and because it can influence public opinion, the media and corporations at both national and international levels. It is also a source of international expertise.

Similarly, the corporate world has become increasingly influential in international politics, where it is now considered to be an important partner. The relationship reached new heights in 2000 when the UN created the Global Compact to encourage businesses to adopt sustainability principles and report on their implementation. Over 9,000 companies have since joined the initiative.

Another set of new actors, the G7 and G20 provide ideal settings for economic influence. The Group of 7, made up of the wealthiest and most powerful Western allies and Japan, wanted a space for policy making that could focus on the political issues of the moment. The Group of 20 is composed of the world’s largest economies. Some consider it a necessary institution to deal with world financial crises and economic planning away from the discordant demands of the UN. Others see it as the antithesis of attempts to create universal diplomatic forums. Concentrating on short term issues determined by the most powerful, it is a throwback to the Concert of Europe with no agenda for development and no secretariat to carry out any long term purposes. An increasingly important actor on the international stage is also the World Economic Forum, meeting annually in Davos, Switzerland. It claims to be committed to

improving the state of the world and engages the foremost political, business and other leaders of society to try to shape global, regional and industry agendas.