

LEON GORDENKER

The United Nations in International Politics



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THE UNITED NATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

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*The United Nations
in International Politics*

EDITED BY LEON GORDENKER

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THE UNITED NATIONS IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

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A quarter of a century after the enthusiastic establishment of the United Nations, it strains the imagination to think of international relations without the presence of that world organization and the large variety of intergovernmental institutions that have grown up around it. In 1970, observers and participants in the business of relations among states take for granted that the United Nations is a factor to be considered. It is accepted as a fact, but the degree of its influence, its value, and its future enjoy anything but unanimous appreciation.

In one sense, differences about the role of the United Nations in international relations and, specifically, in international politics, reach back to its creation twenty-five years ago. That event was taken as heralding important, and perhaps even fundamental, changes in the way the governments of the peoples of the world conducted their mutual affairs. Honest men, whether serving governments or scholarship, differed then about how much effect the new organization would and should have; they still differ.

What was attempted remains clear. New controls were to be applied to the use of force at the international level. To safeguard against violent tactics among the members, the United Nations was formally endowed with a range of means to settle disputes, including for the first time in history an international force fundamentally to maintain peace and security. Economic and social problems received a high priority and the promotion of human rights became a principal aim of international cooperation; an elaborate institutional network, which expanded rapidly and enormously in the postwar setting, was to work toward these ends. Colonies were brought under international surveillance, almost under international supervision. Accumulated

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practice and human ingenuity were to contribute to the improvement and extension of international law.

From the vantage point of 1970, what was established and what was attempted in 1945 can seem both heroic and timid, conservative and daring, faltering and surefooted. The chance to improve the world, according to some, went by default—although the wreckage of the old order left by the war offered the building blocks of the new. Others would say that the construction of institutions and the encouragement of a new regularity of conduct under some agreed standards represent a real gain in a confused world. Yet others would put aside consideration of the relatively new institutions as irrelevant to the real problems of world politics which should be seen in the old light of national power and policies. And some would join in the judgment of irrelevance from another angle, insisting that in 1945, as in 1970, only a radical reconstruction of international society had merit.

Although the meaning of the United Nations in international politics remains controversial and, as in 1945, still defies full understanding in some of its aspects, the judgments of 1970 are based on twenty-five years of experience. The complex of international organizations has reached an unprecedented and unexpected size. Largely unanticipated operations have brought the United Nations system into close contact with governments on their home ground in every part of the world. The United Nations itself has more than doubled in membership. Its recommendations to governments number in the thousands. The tasks assigned by its members reflect adjustments and even distortions of its originally conceived role. Its deliberations range far and wide over the material of international politics and make the United Nations appear as one center—if not *the* center that some of its founders envisaged—for international cooperation or conflict. Some governments may downgrade the importance of the United Nations system, but none disregards it.

Scholars have shown a lively interest: the United Nations and its related international institutions have become a subject of specialized study. This seems a natural progression of research, since scholars of an earlier generation had been deeply involved in the creation and justification of the League of Nations, the first global attempt to institutionalize the maintenance of peace. Others during the period between the two world wars made specific the intellectual shortcomings of the concepts underlying the League, and tried to elucidate its place in world politics. Still others devoted themselves to sometimes deplorably unscholarly propaganda on its behalf. The inability of the League to achieve crucial successes in peacekeeping and the simultaneous but unanticipated burgeoning of economic and social cooperation received the attention of other scholars. Representatives of all these approaches contributed to the wartime planning for the new world organization; since then, new crops of scholars have observed, studied, probed, pontificated, analyzed, and theorized on the United Nations.

This volume employs the 25th anniversary of the United Nations as a moment—perhaps largely of sentimental significance—to review and rethink its work and role, and to peer into the future. It rests on the assumption—or the fact—that international institutions and the deliberate organization of world politics associated with them have achieved a more than ephemeral place in the world. Each chapter attempts in its own way to help answer such questions as these:

What is the present nature of the United Nations?

What relationship does it bear to broader frameworks of world politics?

How can we understand this relationship?

How can we understand the actions of the United Nations?

What standards of judgment can be applied to the United Nations?

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What results are obtained when these are applied?
How can we approach forecasts of the future nature and activities and roles of the United Nations?
What research will better help us to understand the record of the past and the events of the future?
What forecasts may be essayed?

In a world as replete with contradiction, tension, and rapid change as our own, it would be futile to pretend that final or perfect answers can be given to such questions. Indeed, this effort to deal with them reflects both the imperfection of the subject matter and an awareness of the likelihood of change in the international system. Any attempt, therefore, to impose a single framework of analysis on the authors would surely have encouraged misleadingly doctrinaire results.

Yet the essays are clearly related. One source of this relationship can be found in the association of the contributors with the Center of International Studies at Princeton University. For several years they have exchanged ideas, discussed each other's writing, raised unanticipated questions, and sought answers bearing on international politics generally. This volume records some of the results of that association.

All the authors are concerned with the problem of maintaining international peace and specifically with the United Nations as it operates in world politics, but the angles of their approaches differ. In planning for this volume, more emphasis was given to originality of individual research than on symmetry in the finished product. No single methodological pattern guided the authors. Consequently, some chapters emphasize abstract and theoretical points, others empirical referents. Each author has tried to raise new issues and project new ideas, approaching his problems with fresh thought. Every chapter, implicitly or explicitly has a critical purpose—to improve scholarship within its scope.

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Another link among the contributors derives from a common conception of the United Nations as a subsystem within the larger system of the world political environment. This figures more prominently in some chapters than in others, but the systemic approach has influenced each one.

Although this volume does not pretend to treat every possible issue, it does seek answers for specific questions of importance in the United Nations system. They include the relationship of the United Nations with the larger international system; differences and likenesses of the League and the United Nations in handling conflict; how member governments respond to the recommendations of the General Assembly; managing international conflict resulting from intrastate disorders; United Nations economic aid and its effect on member government policies; and evaluative perceptions of the United Nations. Young's chapter uses systems theory to make a number of theoretical distinctions and its comprehensive and theoretical nature makes it a framework for the book.

The relationship which Young explores—between an international organization and the system in which it operates—is also the central concern of Stanley Michalak's "The United Nations and the League." But Michalak's chapter differs from Young's and others in the volume in its strong comparative emphasis. Michalak suggests categories for classifying conflicts involving peace and security in which the United Nations or the League of Nations took part. In effect, he reviews the entire record of both organizations in the peace-making field, and shows how the results in the United Nations differ from those in the League and what systematic factors may explain the differences. As Michalak correctly points out, "comparative analyses of these two organizations are exceedingly rare in the literature on international organization."

Gabriella Rosner Lande's "An Inquiry into the Successes and Failures of the United Nations General Assembly," also takes up the conflict-solving functions of the world organ-

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ization, but from a different angle. Mrs. Lande investigates the responses of member states to resolutions adopted by the General Assembly, thus concentrating on the consequences of the policy-making process within the international organization subsystem, rather than on the operation of the wider international system. Mrs. Lande's analysis is based on a careful examination of 29 important resolutions intended to help maintain international peace, and her conclusions point to a decided capability on the part of the General Assembly to serve usefully (even without compulsion) in a large variety of international disputes.

The source of some of the most dramatic and troubled actions of the United Nations—the conflict within a state that spills over into the international arena—is the central focus in Linda Miller's "International Organization and Internal Conflicts: Some Emerging Patterns of Response." Using a systemic framework, she suggests that the next few decades will see changes in the kind of internal conflict which engages the attention of the United Nations, and therefore new patterns of response. But there is little likelihood, according to Miss Miller, that international organizations will initiate or administer large-scale field operations, or that they will even see the establishment of United Nations precedents as "community authorized norms" for handling internal disputes.

Leon Gordenker's "The United Nations and Economic and Social Change," turns to the less-developed countries and explores the influential relationship between those states and the growing economic and social programs of the UN. It is the only chapter in the book which uses direct field observation. One of several conclusions that suggest the need for additional research is that the economic and social activities of the United Nations tend to produce changes in the nature of the international system.

The final chapter, Richard A. Falk's "The United Nations: Various Systems of Operation," has a more strongly normative and evaluative flavor than the others. His undertak-

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ing, Falk writes, "is one scholar's attempt to respond to U Thant's plea for moral strength." Always cognizant of the background of the international political system, Falk suggests a set of alternative models that may characterize the role of the UN in the future. Appropriately, the final passages point out the vital role of scholarship in understanding the United Nations and its place in the international political system.

CHAPTER 1

*The United Nations and the International System**

ORAN R. YOUNG

A notable gap in existing analyses of the United Nations is the relative absence of any systematic treatment of the links between the Organization itself and the international system in which it operates.¹ These links constitute a complex dual relationship, both sides of which are worthy of serious analysis. The functions and activities of the United Nations are molded by the basic dimensions and dynamic processes of the international system, but the UN is itself an actor in the system and is sometimes able to influence its environment significantly.² Throughout its history the impact of the systemic environment on the Organization has far surpassed the impact of the Organization on the system. Nevertheless, the influence of the United Nations on world politics should not be underestimated, especially in its more subtle and intangible forms.

I

It is important to clarify the proposition that the United Nations is an actor in world politics. This proposition has been a source of widespread confusion and can be attacked

* An earlier draft of portions of this essay appeared in 1968. See Oran R. Young, "The United Nations and the International System," *International Organization*, 22, 4 (Autumn 1968), 902-922.

¹ A similar remark applies to the League of Nations. See Michalak, Chapter 2 below. For a significant, though partial, exception to this general conclusion see Inis L. Claude, Jr., *The Changing United Nations* (New York: Random House, 1967).

² For a discussion of two modes of influence on the political environment of the United Nations, see Lande, Chapter 3 below, and Miller, Chapter 4.

from two angles. On the one hand, political "idealists" have commonly argued that the effort to conceptualize the United Nations as an actor in world politics downgrades the Organization and implicates it too deeply in the traditional arena of power politics. Those who take this view tend to equate the United Nations with the international system as a whole and to think of it as operating somehow *above* the arena of interstate relationships. But this interpretation glosses over important realities. The United Nations has not been able to adopt a posture above the hurly-burly of power politics; it is as deeply involved in this arena as most of the other actors. The problems generated by power politics constitute its fundamental reason for existence, and the states which engage in power politics are its constituent units. Moreover, the UN is only one of a relatively large number of actors in the international system, many of whom are considerably more influential, at least with respect to specific issues or specific segments of the system.

This confusion about the United Nations as an actor poses a serious problem: it tends to set up a tension between the intangible ethos of universalism embedded in the mythology of the United Nations and the realities of its position in the international system. Not only is an antipathy to power politics an important feature of the mythology of the United Nations; many commentators also operate on the tacit assumption that the UN should always play a major role in various classes of problems outlined in the Charter (e.g. threats to international peace and security). While it may sometimes be politically desirable to maintain such pretenses, it is important for the analyst to realize that the ability of the United Nations to act in any given situation is delimited both by the characteristics of the international system at any given moment and by the processes of change in the system itself.

The second line of attack by political "realists" holds that the United Nations is not an actor at all; it is merely a re-

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flector of the activities of its component members. But this interpretation also glosses over many nuances.³ While it is certainly true that the United Nations often reflects the desires and policies of its members, this does not make it unusual in the ranks of actors in world politics. All these actors, including the states and nation-states, can be conceptualized as reflections of the push and pull of their component parts. And though it is true that the central authority structures have a greater degree of autonomy in some actors than in others, the United Nations does not seem very different in this respect from the looser federations among the states in the international system. It has become a commonplace (albeit a true one) to conclude that the United Nations as an actor in world politics is more than the sum of its parts. What is more important in the present context, however, is the fact that the Organization as an actor reflects more than the desires and policies of one or a few of its components. There is no doubt that the United Nations is an actor characterized by a relatively low degree of formal institutionalization. And this may account for some of the confusion regarding its stature, since many commentators on its activities have been steeped in a "world view" that tends to equate actors in world politics with states possessing easily identifiable, formal, and legally constituted institutions of government. Nevertheless, the conceptual biases built into our world view should no longer be allowed to blind us to the important intangible and informal aspects of the roles of the United Nations as an actor in the international system.

The nature of the links between the United Nations and the international system has been shaped by the fact that the system itself has changed rapidly and in far-reaching ways since the end of the Second World War. The United Nations has already survived, though with extensive changes and adaptations, several marked transitions in the

³ Even such a shrewd observer as Claude tends to fall into this trap. See, for example, *op.cit.*, Introduction.

international system. In the immediate aftermath of the war when the UN was being set up, the international system was characterized by a peculiar juxtaposition of political forces. The principal elements, which proved predictably unstable in combination, were: a new and essentially untried set of basic power relationships; deep-seated revulsion against old procedures for the management of power in world politics crystallized by the war itself; a number of politically unsound and increasingly illegitimate remnants of older systems of world order, notably colonial relationships; and the beginnings of a revolution in technology with far-reaching implications in both military and nonmilitary areas. Though this unstable combination formed the effective environment for the formative activities of the UN, it quickly gave way to the international relationships that lasted from the late forties well into the sixties and that soon became identified with such concepts as bipolarity, the revolution in nuclear weapons, and the Cold War. The UN responded to the dynamics of an essentially bipolar international system with extensive adaptations, both institutional and functional in nature, which carried its activities far from the concepts incorporated in the Charter.⁴

In the middle and late sixties, however, a number of trends in the international system began to cumulate in patterns that diverged too much from those of the period of bipolarity and the Cold War to be called variations on a theme. And the current period is increasingly characterized by a decline, though not a termination, of bipolarity; the growth of significant common interests between the superpowers; polycentric developments in the blocs and the deterioration of major alliance systems; the rise or reemergence of a small number of additional power centers such as the People's Republic of China, Japan, France, and the Federal Republic of Germany; the development of distinct

⁴ For a more extended analysis of a number of these adaptations consult Oran R. Young, *The Intermediaries: Third Parties in International Crises* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), Chapter 4.

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and frequently discontinuous regional subsystems within the global system; the increasing salience of North-South tension, and the development of ambiguities concerning the role of the state as the dominant unit of world politics. A central feature of the international system at present is an ambiguity, arising from clear and extensive fluidity with as yet no well-established pattern or direction of change. It is therefore hardly surprising that the United Nations now also gives the impression of great flux without a set pattern of evolution.

In view of the extent of these changes in the international system the basic adaptability of the UN seems remarkable. Despite a number of proximate ups and downs since 1945 the Organization has continuously displayed enough flexibility and resilience in the face of changes in the international system to be considered at least minimally useful and worthy of retention by the great majority of member states. This adaptability appears to emanate from the constitutional fluidity of the United Nations as well as from the fact that most of the leading figures who have operated within its framework over the years have adopted a pragmatic political stance. It should not, however, be thought that this adaptability has been achieved at no cost. Over the years the United Nations has paid a substantial price for continuing relevance: constant and unsettling role fluctuation,⁵ inability to move along a clear-cut path of institution building, and general inchoateness.

II

Since the United Nations is only one among a relatively large number of actors in the international system, it does not at any given moment play an important role in all the major issues of international politics.⁶ Changes in the inter-

⁵ For an evaluative discussion of these roles, see Falk, Chapter 6 below.

⁶ It is possible to distinguish different levels of United Nations involvement in international issues. At the most minimal level of

national system itself, moreover, often have far-reaching effects on the extent of UN involvement in specific issues. Consider in this connection the impact of the following factors as determinants of involvement.⁷

Great-power Issues

There are at least three relevant aspects of the question of great-power issues. First, there was a clear presumption when the United Nations was established that the Organization would play no more than a marginal role in issues involving the great powers *inter se*. This presumption was explicitly institutionalized both in the voting procedures of the Security Council and in the division of labor between the Council and the other policy organs. Second, there was a tacit assumption that the Organization would be cautious about taking an active part in a problem that seemed an imminent focus of overt great-power competition. Third, it was generally assumed that the blessing of the great powers would be a prerequisite for active UN involvement in specific issues, especially in the peace and security field.

These early injunctions concerning involvement have shifted substantially. During the Uniting for Peace era,⁸ efforts were made by the Western powers to use the UN as an instrument in the Cold War, to legitimize various aspects of competitive great-power diplomacy. In the fifties and early sixties, on the other hand, interest rose sharply in operations involving preventive diplomacy and the insulation of trouble spots from potential great-power involvement. As a result, even though the UN steered away from

verbal concern it can be argued that the Organization does become involved in most international issues. Involvement of this kind is insignificant, however, in many cases. The concept refers to more significant levels of involvement in the present discussion.

⁷ The following list is neither exhaustive nor cast in the form of a logical partition. It therefore does not lend itself to efforts to attach precise weights to the various determinants of United Nations involvement.

⁸ The activities of this period are discussed in some detail in Young, *The Intermediaries*, Chapter 4.

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issues directly involving the great powers, it tried to reduce the range of overt great-power confrontations by preventive actions. In the current period of fluidity, these latter ideas remain politically influential. But, as might be expected given the present ambiguities of the international system, they are now being increasingly supplemented by the emergence of great-power interests in coordinating their actions on particular issues,⁹ at least tacitly, through the United Nations, and by the emergence of concepts concerning the possibilities for more active UN roles in certain problems involving the great powers *inter se*.¹⁰

Spheres of Influence

Despite the revulsion against past forms of international politics in the postwar period, *de facto* spheres of influence have remained a basic feature of the international system, especially with respect to East-West politics. The physical locus of a particular problem within a major sphere of influence has always barred significant UN involvement. It is true that the boundaries of specific spheres have sometimes seemed hazy and that such barriers have not totally prohibited the display of UN interest, but cases such as Hungary, Tibet, and the Dominican Republic emphasize the extent to which this factor can effectively limit the degree of involvement.

At the same time, the impact of particular spheres of influence on UN involvement has shifted. The American sphere of influence in Latin America has traditionally been the most formally recognized one¹¹ and it is still of some importance. But in recent years it has been shrinking to a

⁹ The activities of the great powers in such cases as Cyprus and the India-Pakistan clash of 1965 are interesting from this perspective.

¹⁰ The role of the United Nations, and especially the Secretary-General, in the Cuban crisis of 1962 constitutes a case in point.

¹¹ Thus, the only regional arrangements mentioned in the Covenant of the League were those for Latin America (Article 21). And concern for the sanctity of these arrangements was perhaps the most powerful force behind the drafting of Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter.

small core of essential issues in terms of barring UN involvement in specific Latin American problems. On a more *de facto* basis, the Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe remains one of the sharpest international barriers to United Nations action. Yet current trends make it doubtful that even this barrier will survive intact in the foreseeable future. Perhaps the greatest shift since the late forties with respect to spheres of influence, however, stems from the growing atmosphere of caution surrounding any United Nations actions on the periphery of China. Though the issue of China itself continues to be aired in the Organization, both the overt policies of China and its generally negative attitude toward the UN are important factors underlying the current avoidance of many Asian problems.

Underlying Doctrines

An understandable, though politically ambiguous, determinant of United Nations involvement stems from the underlying doctrines concerning UN operations at any given time. Regardless of calculations concerning the efficacy of specific actions, there is a strong tendency to take a favorable view of intervention in situations that conform, at least superficially, to the prevailing images of the issues the Organization ought to be handling. This factor also accounts for some of the shifts over time in patterns of involvement, since prevailing images, especially in the peace and security area, have passed through several distinguishable phases since 1945.¹²

The impact of underlying doctrines is doubly important since specific actions identified with a given set of doctrines have sometimes produced backlash effects rather than positive precedents of future relevance. In the aftermath of the Korean intervention, for example, interest in interventions predicated upon the Uniting for Peace image of peacekeeping declined sharply. And the difficulties of the Congo

¹² For a detailed discussion linking these shifts to changes in the international system see Young, *The Intermediaries*, Chapter 4.

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operation have unquestionably made UN decision-makers wary of involvements in subsequent internal war situations. At the same time, the influence of underlying doctrines has recently become increasingly ambiguous. The United Nations has witnessed both a horizontal spread of simultaneously operative doctrines and a decline in the relative dominance of any given set.¹³ Consequently, the Organization is now extremely cautious about new involvements—though when action does seem desirable, some doctrinal justification can usually be found.

Specific Membership Problems

A more tangible but equally important factor affecting UN involvement in concrete issues arises from specific membership problems. The doctrinal foundation clearly suggests a thrust toward universal membership and, therefore, relevance on a global basis. Though the United Nations itself has played some role in increasing the number of its members, it has always fallen significantly short of universality. This is not necessarily a critical problem in the case of small states that are non-members, since the Organization can on occasion take actions directly affecting their interests regardless of their membership status and their attitudes toward intervention.¹⁴ The problem is not so easy in the case of larger powers and their dependencies who resist interference, unless the UN allows itself to become an instrument of particular factions in the international system.

Since 1945 specific membership problems have affected patterns of UN involvement in a number of contexts. The inability of the United Nations to deal effectively with the problems of Central Europe stems from the absence of all German representatives as well as from great-power

¹³ For an exploration of some of these developments see Oran R. Young, "Trends in International Peacekeeping," *Research Monograph No. 22*, Princeton Center of International Studies, 1966.

¹⁴ Legal justification for such actions can be found in Article 2(6) of the Charter. The Korean intervention constitutes a clear case of activities along these lines.

competition in the Cold War context. More recently, the marked failure of the UN to play a major role in many Asian problems can be explained, at least partially, in terms of the negative attitudes of China and other Asian non-members such as the two Vietnams. Moreover, the ventures of the Organization into instrumental relationships with partial groupings in international politics have often tended to result in sharp setbacks for the overall relevance of the United Nations. This was certainly the case, for example, during the "westernized" period in the Uniting for Peace era. And it is interesting to speculate whether the same thing will happen if current African efforts to use the UN as an instrument of political change meet with proximate success.

General Membership Questions

By the same token, the general characteristics and basic patterns of interest of the membership of the Organization play a role in determining whether the United Nations will become involved in specific situations. Though all members nominally subscribe to certain common goals as a condition of membership,¹⁵ the actual concerns of the members have tended to diverge considerably from these abstract formulations, and the predominant patterns of interest have shifted greatly over the years. As a result, the UN has fluctuated with respect to the issues regarded as both desirable and politically feasible for involvement.

The fact that the composition of the United Nations has changed rapidly over the years, both in numbers and in coalition patterns, has emphasized the importance of this determinant of involvement. This is another area in which the prior actions of the UN itself have been an important cause of the changes.¹⁶ But in any case, the issue orientation of the United Nations has shifted drastically in the transi-

¹⁵ These are set forth in Articles 1 and 4 of the Charter.

¹⁶ That is, the United Nations played some role in the processes through which many of its current members achieved independence.