

Chapter 1

The best hope of mankind? A brief history of the UN

We usually think of international organizations as a twentieth-century phenomenon that started with the establishment of the League of Nations in 1919. This is, for the most part, true. However, in the late nineteenth century nations had already established international organizations for dealing with specific issues. The foremost among them were the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), founded in 1865 (originally called the International Telegraph Union), and the Universal Postal Union, which dates back to 1874. Today, both of these organizations are part of the UN system. The International Peace Conference held in The Hague in 1899 established the Permanent Court of Arbitration, which started its work in 1902. It was the first medium for settling international disputes between countries and a predecessor of the UN's International Court of Justice. The outbreak of World War I in August 1914 and the carnage that followed, however, showed the limits of this mechanism. It also signaled the final end of an international system—the so-called Concert of Europe—that had saved the old Continent from the scourge of a major war since Napoleon's adventures a century earlier.

Between 1914 and 1918, Europe saw the worst killing spree of its already bloody history. Almost twenty million people perished. Empires (the Ottoman, the Austro-Hungarian, and, temporarily, the Russian) collapsed. New nations (such as Czechoslovakia,

Estonia, and Finland) were born. Radical revolutions were won (in Russia) and lost (in Germany). In short, a new world order emerged.

The League of Nations: "a definite guaranty of peace"

Amid the carnage, in January 1918, President Woodrow Wilson outlined his idea of the League of Nations. Given the utter devastation caused by World War I, support for the idea of an international organization was widespread. To many, an international organization with the power to settle disputes before they escalated into military conflicts appeared to be the answer. Although the United States would eventually fail to join the League of Nations, Wilson chaired the 1919 Versailles Peace Conference's commission on the establishment of an international organization. Wilson, for one, had few reservations about the significance of the League. As he declared to a joint session of the U.S. Congress in 1919:

It is a definite guaranty of peace. It is a definite guaranty by word against aggression. It is a definite guaranty against the things which have just come near bringing the whole structure of civilization into ruin. Its purposes do not for a moment lie vague. Its purposes are declared, and its powers are unmistakable. It is not in contemplation that this should be merely a league to secure the peace of the world. It is a league which can be used for cooperation in any international matter.¹

The president was not alone in placing such high hopes in the new organization. Wilson, with his open idealism and fresh internationalism, offered a ray of hope for a better future. But in retrospect, Wilson's confident rhetoric appears out of place. The new League was dealt a devastating blow when the U.S. Senate refused to ratify the Versailles Treaty. The country never joined the League, making the newly formed organization permanently handicapped.



2. President Woodrow Wilson rides with French premier Georges Clemenceau to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

Nevertheless, after being housed temporarily in London, the League commenced its operations in Geneva, Switzerland, in 1920. It soon scored some limited successes. In the early 1920s, the League settled territorial disputes between Finland and Sweden over the Åland Islands, between Germany and Poland over Upper Silesia, and between Iraq and Turkey over the city of Mosul. The League combated the international opium trade and alleviated refugee crises in Russia with some success. By acting as the umbrella organization for such agencies as the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Permanent Court of International Justice (predecessor of today's International Court of Justice, ICJ), it also provided a model for the future United Nations.

A victors' organization, the League was dominated by France and Great Britain, with Japan and Italy as the other two permanent members of the League Council (the rough equivalent to the UN Security Council and the highest authority on matters of international security). The twenty-eight founding members, represented in the General Assembly, were mostly from Europe and Latin America.

Indeed, the League of Nations was in this sense an expression of the Eurocentric world of its times: virtually all of Africa, Asia, and the Middle East were controlled by European imperial powers. To be sure, the League established the so-called mandate system to prepare the "natives" of some territories previously ruled by the German and Ottoman empires for self-government and independence. The governments that received the mandates—for example, Britain in Palestine and France in Lebanon and Syria—were granted broad authority regarding such preparations. They took their time. Independence for most European mandates would have to wait until after 1945 and would be accompanied by much violence, instability, and, in the long run, chronic insecurity.

Shortsighted though they were, the mandates were a time bomb that would explode only *after* the League had ceased to exist. It was the League's failure to prevent the outbreak of World War II that caused its demise.

The world at war

Although the absence of the United States was a significant factor in rendering the League of Nations ineffectual, the organization's importance was further minimized by the lack of respect it commanded among other great powers. Germany and the Soviet Union were members, but only briefly: Germany joined in 1926, only to exit the League after the Nazis came to power in 1933. In 1933 the Soviet Union entered the League. Six years later, after its attack on Finland in late 1939, the USSR became the only League member ever to be expelled.

By that point the League had also seen the departure of two of its founding members. Unhappy with the League's criticism of its occupation of Manchuria, Japan left the club in 1933. In 1935–36 Italy was equally dismissive of its membership obligations after its successful attack and occupation of Ethiopia, one of the three African members of the League (the others were Liberia and South Africa).

Why did the League fail in countering this series of aggressive acts by a number of great powers willing to use military force for expansionist purposes? The global economic crisis of the 1930s certainly curbed the enthusiasm of others—France and Britain in particular—to risk lives and resources to fight distant wars that did not have an immediate bearing on their national security. Thus, they turned to appeasement, a policy that ultimately failed. During the 1938 Munich Conference, Britain and France acquiesced in the dismantlement of Czechoslovakia by agreeing to the addition of the Sudetenland to Hitler's Reich. If that act had been justified by the existence of a large German-speaking population in the ceded parts of Czechoslovakia, there might have been no excuse for Germany's later occupation of the remainder of Czechoslovakia. When Germany finally attacked Poland in September 1939, after concluding a sinister pact with the Soviet Union a month earlier, the high hopes placed upon the League only two decades earlier were completely crushed.

The United Nations

The League of Nations was further handicapped by its inability to apply sufficient pressure in clear-cut cases of aggression. According to its covenant, the League could introduce verbal or economic sanctions against an aggressor and, if these methods failed, intervene militarily. In theory these steps were logical and reasonable. But while verbal sanctions could not deter an aggressor that was determined and strong, economic sanctions required international collaboration. As the League had no authority beyond its limited membership, a country suffering from the pressure of economic sanctions could still trade with nonmembers. Especially during the international economic crisis of the 1930s, willing trading partners were not hard to find. Because the League had no army of its own, military intervention required member countries to furnish the necessary troops. In practice this meant French or British troops, but neither country was interested in getting involved in potentially costly conflicts in Africa or Asia.

12

By the time the League expelled the Soviet Union in 1939, there was no getting around the fact that it had failed in its overall objective. The League had not become, as Wilson had hoped, a "definite guaranty for peace." Nevertheless, the onset of World War II made it even more evident that some form of international organization was needed to safeguard against yet another descent to Armageddon in the future. One goal was paramount: a repetition of the League experience could not be allowed.

An act of creation

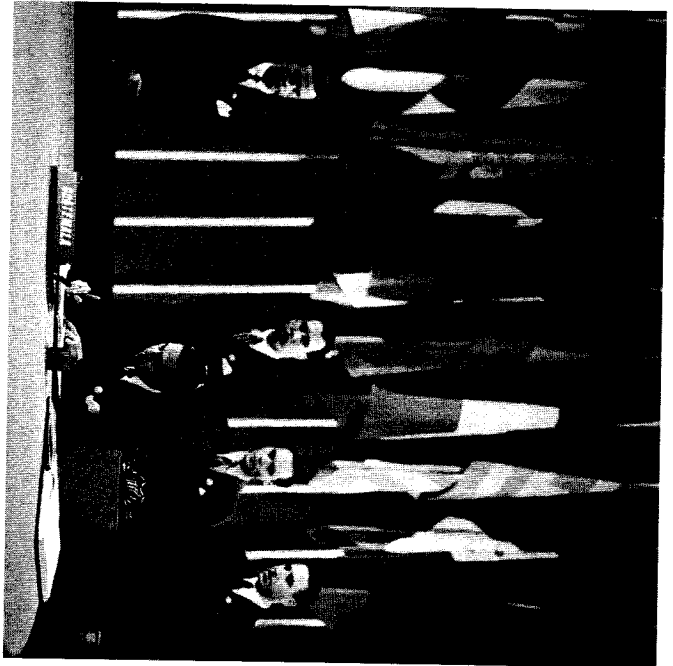
The first "Declaration by United Nations" dates back to January 1, 1942, when representatives of twenty-six nations pledged their governments to continue fighting together to defeat the Axis powers and to obtain a "just" peace. Thus, unlike the League, the UN started off as an alliance that came into being soon after the American entry to the war, following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and Germany's declaration of war on the United States in December 1941. World War II became a truly global conflict, pitting the so-called Grand Alliance (headed by the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union) against the Axis powers (Germany, Italy, and Japan).

World War II was, simply, deadly. The estimated civilian and military death tolls ran as high as 72 million. The deeper impact of the war on global and national economies, as well as on political structures around the globe, was profound. European empires collapsed either during or as a result of the war. The United States and the Soviet Union emerged as the strongest nations on earth. Germany and Japan were occupied and militarily emasculated. In sum, the world was transformed.

The UN was created, in part, to manage that transformation. As in the case of the League, it was an initiative of the American president, this time Franklin D. Roosevelt, whose administration

The best hope of mankind? A brief history of the UN

13



3. After months of intense negotiations, the UN Charter was officially adopted on June 25, 1945. A member of the Guatemalan delegation signs the charter at the official signing ceremony the next day.

pushed for the creation of the UN during the last years of the war. In August 1944 delegates from China, the Soviet Union, the United Kingdom, and the United States met at Dumbarton Oaks, a private estate in Washington, D.C., to draw up the basic blueprint for the new international organization. By October the outline for the UN Charter was ready. After the surrender of Germany in April of the following year (and the death of Roosevelt in the same month), the charter was signed in San Francisco on June 26, 1945. On October 24, 1945, with the Pacific war also concluded, the United Nations officially came into existence.

The basic issue with which the drafters of the UN Charter dealt was in essence unchanged from the one Wilson and his European counterparts had faced in 1918–19. They wanted to create an organization that would, indeed, be a definite guaranty of peace. There was plenty of skepticism, understandably so given the fate of the League's lofty goals. And, as earlier, the basic dilemmas and conundrums had not changed: How to balance national sovereignty and international idealism? How to reconcile the imbalances between countries over power and influence, over resources and commitments? How, in other words, could one draft a charter that would recognize and effectively deal with the sheer fact that some countries were, ultimately, more equal than others? How could one make sure that some countries would not simply walk out—as Japan had done in the 1930s—when it did not like the decisions of the UN?

The men who drafted the UN Charter addressed this issue with a simple mechanism: the veto power. In other words, the charter gave superior powers to five of the founding members of the UN—China, France, Great Britain, the United States, and the USSR—that allowed them to prevent any decisions that they viewed inimical to their interests from being made. They became the Permanent Five (P-5) of the UN Security Council, countries that would have a seat in the most important body of the new organization as long as it existed. This strategy, it was thought, would provide the key countries with an incentive to remain part of the UN. It also provided them with the means of neutralizing the world organization.

Although its founders were keenly aware of the failures of the League of Nations, most of its ideals and many structural elements were at the core of the UN Charter. Most evidently, the UN Charter and the League Covenant cited the promotion of international security and the peaceful settlement of disputes as key goals. But the UN Charter was different in two important respects.

The UN Charter in brief

The UN Charter consists of a series of articles divided into chapters. Chapter 1 sets forth the general purposes of the United Nations, most importantly the maintenance of international peace and security. Chapter 2 defines the general criteria for membership in the United Nations; it was open to "all peace-loving states." Applicants would, however, have to be "recommended" by the UN Security Council, thus giving the UNSC the right to veto any country's membership.

The bulk of the document is contained in chapters 3 through 15, which describe the organs and institutions of the UN and their respective powers. Perhaps the most important chapters, however, are those dealing with the enforcement powers of the key UN bodies. Chapters 6 and 7, for example, discuss the Security Council's power to investigate and mediate disputes as well as its power to authorize sanctions or the use of military force. Subsequent chapters deal with the UN's powers for economic and social cooperation; the Trusteeship Council, which oversaw decolonization; the powers of the International Court of Justice; and the functions of the United Nations Secretariat, the administrative arm (or permanent bureaucracy) of the UN.

It differed from the League Covenant particularly in its emphasis on the promotion of social and economic progress as a central goal. The latter had been part of the League of Nations Covenant as well, but it appeared, and then only briefly, in article 23. In contrast, the very preamble of the UN Charter reads: "to employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples."

The reason for highlighting the significance of economic and social development was rooted in the interwar years. Many saw the global economic depression of the late 1920s and 1930s as the primary cause of the political upheavals that had led to the rise of

ultranationalism and the acts of aggression that had produced World War II. Thus, promoting economic and social equality was seen as a way of safeguarding international security.

The founders of the UN wanted to create an organization that would be able to prevent that "scourge of war" from descending upon mankind yet again. For this purpose, they defined the question of international security in broader terms than had those who erected the League of Nations. They also aimed to create a structure that would allow the UN to be an active participant in world affairs in its key areas: military security, economic and social development, and the upholding of human rights and international justice.

In a sense, there was something for everybody but also a recipe for future conundrums.

The early Cold War and the UN

The original signatories of the UN Charter hardly expected that the simple act of creation would guarantee a peaceful world order. In fact, the UN shared a significant common feature with its predecessor: Like the League of Nations, the UN was, at its very founding, a "victors' organization." Major wartime adversaries and their allies and co-belligerents were not awarded membership until later. For example, the first UN Security Council members included Brazil, Egypt, Mexico, New Zealand, Norway, and Poland; Italy, Japan and Germany were left out. Nevertheless, the hope that the UN would be a more effective force in safeguarding international security rested on the fact that its founders did include both the United States and the Soviet Union.

As the delegates of fifty-one nations arrived for the first series of meetings in London in January 1946, the general atmosphere of international relations was already deteriorating. In February, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin made a much criticized speech in

which he described a world irrevocably divided between two economic and political systems. On March 5, 1946, former British prime minister Winston Churchill responded by declaring that an Iron Curtain had descended across Europe. A year later, the U.S. president Harry Truman unveiled the Truman Doctrine, the first public expression of America's long-term strategy of containing the expansion of Soviet and communist influence.

Subsequent descent to the Cold War was rapid. By February 1948 the establishment of the Iron Curtain in East-Central Europe was concluded when Czechoslovakia joined the ranks of Soviet bloc communist dictatorships. In Western Europe, the United States assumed a preponderant position as the counterweight to Soviet influence by assisting the anti-communist faction in the Greek Civil War, offering aid to Turkey because that country was being pressed by the USSR and, most significantly, launching the European Recovery Program, which, between 1948 and 1952, boosted the economic recovery of Western Europe. The creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in April 1949 cemented the division of Europe into two hostile blocs. In subsequent years (and decades) the Cold War became increasingly global and militarized. The creation of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949, was quickly followed by the Sino-Soviet alliance and, in June 1950, the outbreak of the Korean War, which presented the UN with its first severe challenge.

The onset of the Cold War and the outbreak of the first major hot war of the post-1945 era did not destroy the UN. But it did fundamentally shape its role in international relations and restricted its ability to act as a positive force for international security. The Korean conflict was to remain the only large-scale UN military intervention during the Cold War era, made possible only by the absence of the USSR from the Security Council sessions in June 1950; the Soviets were boycotting the UN's refusal to admit the newly constituted People's Republic of China into the organization. Thus, the Soviet representative was not there to

veto a resolution sponsored by the United States, a right that the USSR employed no fewer than eighty times between 1946 and 1955.

The Soviet use of the veto was, in fact, linked to another Cold War-induced handicap: the deadlock in adding new members to the UN. Being a "peace-loving state" clearly did not suffice as a qualification. During the first decade after San Francisco only nine countries were added to the roster: Afghanistan, Iceland, Sweden, and Thailand in 1946; Pakistan and Yemen in 1947; Burma (now Myanmar) in 1948; Israel in 1949; and Indonesia in 1950. How much more "peace-loving" some of these countries were when compared to such persistent applicants as Finland or Austria is questionable.

In fact, there was no shortage of applicants. But the Korean War (1950-53) made any cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union virtually impossible. On top of this there was a Soviet-American disagreement over procedure: while the Soviets wanted a package deal that would ensure the simultaneous addition of roughly an equal number of pro-Soviet, pro-American, and neutral states to the UN roster, the United States insisted that each application should be decided upon the merits of the specific country. The end result was a deadlock: after 1950 no new members were added for five years.

Most of all, however, the controversy over the People's Republic of China's (PRC) bid to join the UN and the Security Council severely hurt the organization's credibility in the 1950s and 1960s. Having won the Chinese civil war in 1949, the PRC—or "Red China" as most American politicians called it—claimed that it was the rightful representative of all Chinese. This notion was vehemently rejected by the Republic of China (ROC, or Taiwan), which, as an ally of the United States, received constant American support. For more than two decades Taiwan—a small island off the Chinese coast where the Nationalist Chinese had fled after communist

victory—represented China in the UN. Most crucially, Taiwan wielded a veto right in the Security Council as though it was one of the world's five great powers. Only in 1971, when the Nixon administration wished to open a diplomatic relationship to the PRC, did Washington change its policy of nonrecognition of the PRC. Beijing, however, remained adamant in its claim to represent all of China. Thus, the PRC replaced Taiwan in the UN and the Security Council, leaving the island and its population of approximately 22 million outside the UN.

Although the emergence of the Cold War fundamentally affected the UN's effectiveness in its first decade, there were a number of positive developments as well. None of these was more significant than the 1948 adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document negotiated under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt, widow of the former president. Also in 1948, the UN sent its first peace observers to South Asia and the Middle East. In the latter region, the civil rights activist Ralph Bunche successfully mediated armistice agreements between the new state of Israel and its Arab neighbors in 1948–49. In the same period, the UN was active in dealing with the needs of World War II European refugees, resulting ultimately in the creation of the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) in 1950.

But such milestones could not mask the fact that during its first decade the UN was hostage to a highly charged international climate. In particular, only a shift in the nature of the Cold War could resolve the membership deadlock that by the mid-1950s began to undermine the UN's credibility as a truly open international organization.

Decolonization and development

Sixteen countries joined the UN in 1955, bringing the total number of members to seventy-six. The sudden enlargement came as a result of a package deal in which Eastern members such as

Albania, Bulgaria, and Hungary were balanced against such Western ones as Italy, Portugal, and Spain. In addition, the package deal included a number of neutral European countries (Austria, Finland, and Ireland) and a few that had been recently granted independence (Cambodia, Laos, and Libya).

The 1955 package deal reflected a temporary easing of East-West tensions in the aftermath of Stalin's death and the end of the Korean War. Only a year later, however, international tensions again increased as two virtually simultaneous crises erupted. In October 1956, Soviet troops intervened to crush a democracy movement in Hungary. The brutal suppression did not lead to any American action—in part because it coincided with an ill-fated British, French, and Israeli attack on Egypt after Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser had announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal. Ironically, the Suez crisis prompted the first significant case in which the Americans and Soviets found themselves on the same side at the UN: both voted in favor of a resolution calling for the immediate withdrawal of foreign troops from Egypt.

The 1956 Suez crisis is sometimes described as a moment that crystallized the end of European imperial pretensions. In the years that followed, the bulk of the Belgian, British, and French colonies gained independence. As they did so, the new nations worked hard to gain rapid international recognition. One of the most important symbols of their new nationhood was membership in the UN.

It is therefore not surprising that the number of countries added to the UN in 1955 soon paled when compared to the expansion that followed. Between 1956 and 1968 the membership grew to 119 (by 1962 the UN had already doubled its original roster of fifty-one). With a few exceptions (Japan, which joined in 1956, the foremost among them), these new members consisted of former African and Asian colonies of European powers. Most were economically

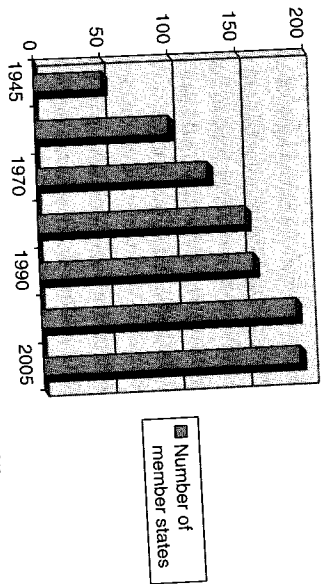


Chart 1.1 The growth of UN membership since 1945.

backward when compared to the original members. In the twenty-first century many continue to be wrecked by civil conflicts and have become permanent theaters of various UN operations.

The new nations had another common feature: the bulk of them refused to choose a side in the East-West confrontation, opting for membership in the so-called Nonaligned Movement (NAM) instead. The movement started out with a meeting of twenty-five nations at Belgrade, Yugoslavia, in 1961. In subsequent decades NAM grew to a grouping of more than one hundred nations that transcended the Cold War. In 2012, for example, it held another summit meeting in Tehran, Iran. NAM has been, since the 1970s, the largest grouping of countries represented in the UN General Assembly.

The main impact of NAM was to place the focus of UN activities and concerns on social and economic questions, particularly on the unequal distribution of wealth between the countries of the global North and South. The first UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), held in 1964, highlighted this goal by the formation of the Group of 77 (G-77), a loose organization of developing countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa that attempts to keep development aid at the center of the UN's agenda.

In this they have been successful. The expanded UN clearly honed in on economic, social, and environmental questions in the 1960s and 1970s. There were major UN-sponsored international conferences on the environment (1972) and the status of women (1975). The UN adopted conventions against racial discrimination (1969) and to combat gender-based intolerance and discrimination (1979). And the UN Environment Programme (UNEP) succeeded in pushing for the signing of the Treaty on the Protection of the Ozone Layer (the Montreal Protocol) in 1987. In 1980 the World Health Organization (WHO) declared smallpox extinct (the last case having been reported in 1977). While the organization's ability to deal with international security issues (particularly with interstate and intrastate wars) was in some doubt throughout the Cold War, the UN was actively addressing the many other global challenges, particularly those facing its newer member states.

The UN in the post-Cold War era

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War transformed international politics and the UN. With the disappearance of the persistent East-West confrontation, many expected that the UN Security Council would finally take its rightful role as the provider and guarantor of international peace and security. According to the "Agenda for Peace," adopted in the summer of 1992, the UN would use preventive diplomacy, peacemaking, and peacekeeping to make its mark on the post-Cold War international order. With the superpower confrontation over, development aid was supposed to become less politicized. Hence, in 1994 the UN published its "Agenda for Development." Not to be outdone, human rights activists pushed through an "Agenda for Democracy" in 1996. If the number of agendas was to be any guide, a golden age of global governance was at hand. "This era of global challenges leaves no choice but cooperation at the global level," maintained UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan upon receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in 2001.²

Annan, the charming Ghanaian who led the UN for a decade (1997–2007), was undoubtedly right. But he surely knew that his high-minded ideals were far from being realized at the start of the new millennium. The decade and a half after the end of the Cold War has seen many changes both in the UN's policies and within the organization itself. But greater relevance in determining global affairs is hardly among them.

There has been growth in numerous ways. UN membership has increased from 159 countries in 1989 to 193 in 2015. In the same period the UN budget jumped from \$2.6 billion to roughly \$25 billion. This has resulted partly from the increase in the number of UN peace operations since the end of the Cold War. Thirteen operations were undertaken in the first four decades of the UN's existence; thirty-six have been authorized since 1988. In 2014 there were approximately 104,000 UN peacekeepers around the globe, compared to 13,000 three decades earlier. The cost of these operations grew tenfold: from approximately \$500 million in the late 1980s to \$7 billion in 2015. At the same time the UN was almost hyperactive in its presentation of numerous ambitious undertakings and plans, prompted by countless studies and conferences. Much of this activism was crystallized in 2000, when the UN unveiled its Millennium Development Program: a list of eight universal goals that ranged from halving extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education. This was all to be achieved by 2015.

Such growth and activism could not, however, mask the harsh realities that the UN faced in the post–Cold War era. Despite the explosion in the number of its peace operations, the balance between success and failure tended to tilt toward the latter.

Although the UN may have succeeded in the transformation of Namibia to majority rule, for example, it failed in preventing massive killings in former Yugoslavia or Rwanda. Though the percentage of people living in extreme poverty in Asia may have

declined in the early years of the twenty-first century, similar numbers had gone up in Africa.

The UN's first seven decades were, thus, replete with change. The growth in membership alone meant that the organization was, by the early twenty-first century, the only truly global institution. But this development was filled with challenges and frustrations as the rapidly transforming UN dealt with, among others, questions of international and human security, post-conflict management, human rights, and social and economic development. Operating on a global scale, with an international staff and within the overall context of a conflict-ridden international system, the UN usually had only mixed success in any of these fields.

One clue to understanding why this is the case lies within the hybrid structure of the international organization itself.

Chapter 2

An impossible hybrid: the structure of the United Nations

In an interview with *Time* magazine in the summer of 1955, Dag Hammarskjöld expressed his frustration over the UN's public image. He worried, in particular, that many people considered the organization—at the time barely ten years old—as a bureaucratic monstrosity incapable of addressing the real concerns of real people. Equally important, Hammarskjöld thought that such disaffection was distancing the UN from the very people it was designed to serve. There was but one solution. As Hammarskjöld explained: “Everything will be all right—you know when? When people, just people, stop thinking of the United Nations as a weird Picasso abstraction and see it as a drawing they made themselves.”¹

The second UN Secretary-General's remarks are indicative of one of the central problems of the world organization. In 1955 the UN was indeed present but distant, not the least because the UN worked in so many different fields, through so many different agencies, and with such a variety of different goals. It was, as it still remains, “a weird Picasso abstraction,” an organizational hybrid, its many functions impossible to explain in plain language. There is no point in mincing words: the UN is a structural monstrosity, a conglomeration of organizations, divisions, bodies, and secretariats all with their distinctive acronyms that few can ever imagine being able to master. This, alone, explains many of the UN's problems.

26

The central point, though, is that the rationale behind the creation of this hybrid—the Picasso abstraction in Hammarskjöld's words—is simple: it was made up by people from many nations, with divergent backgrounds and goals. Equally important, the founders of the UN (and the designers of its structure) were faced with the everlasting dilemma: how to reconcile national interests—national security, national prosperity, national laws—with international aspirations—international security, global development, universal justice, and human rights. The structure that was created reflected this dilemma and is one of the reasons for the outcome: a painting that is part abstraction, part real.

The UN “family”

In 1945 the six principal organs of the UN were the General Assembly, Security Council, Economic and Social Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, and the Secretariat. With the exception of the Trusteeship Council, which became obsolete with the completion of the decolonization process it oversaw, these organs still constitute the basic superstructure of the UN. All of them meet regularly, and their members vote and make decisions, issue declarations, and debate the issues of the day. Yet the functions of these organs are vastly different: while the GA is basically the parliament of the UN and the Security Council its executive committee, the Secretariat is the operational body of—or the bureaucracy that runs—the UN.

The UN “family,” though, is much larger, encompassing fifteen agencies and several programs and bodies. Some of the organizations, such as the International Labor Organization (ILO), were founded during the League of Nations era in the 1920s. Many more have been created since 1945 to address the specific problems that the UN has been called to solve. Much of this proliferation—and the ensuing complexity of the UN—is the result of a rapid growth in membership that, in the decades following the founding of the organization, contributed to the

27

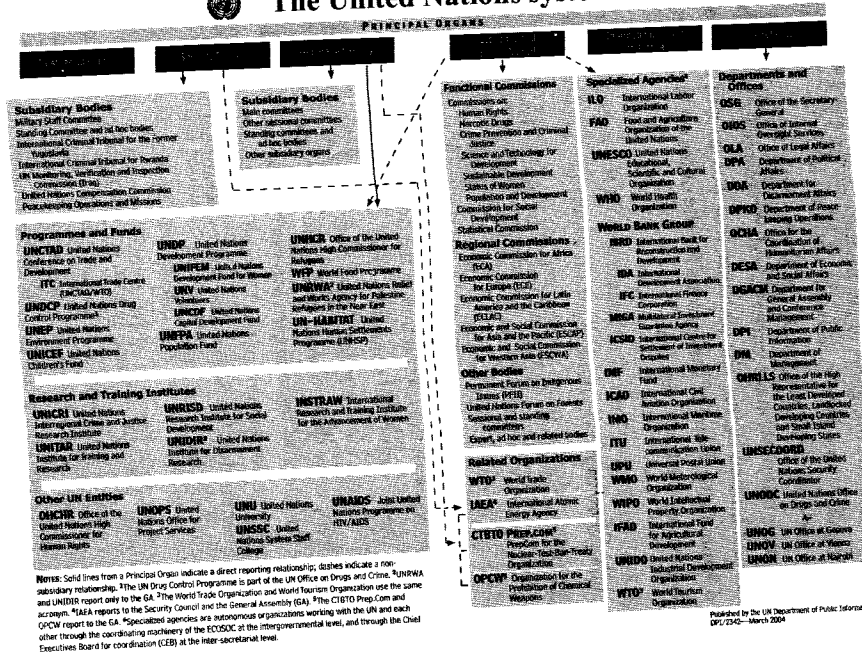


CHART 2.1 The United Nations System

escalation of the tasks that the UN has been charged to undertake. As a result, new bodies and programs have been (and continue to be) added on a regular basis. Others, such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), were originally meant to be temporary but have since been transformed into permanent organs. Many, inevitably, overlap with others.

To top it all off, the UN has a hybrid set of “subsidiaries” and partners. Throughout its history, the UN has associated with almost three thousand NGOs. This was already envisioned in 1945: article 77 of the UN Charter explicitly states that the UN “may make suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations [NGOs] which are concerned with matters within its competence.” In practice this means that every year the UN works together with hundreds of NGOs to undertake humanitarian tasks in the world’s conflict zones. For example, between 1995 and 2002 the UN Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina (UNMIBH) oversaw that country’s process of peacebuilding—most significantly the establishment of the rule of law—after a nasty war. Throughout the period it participated with close to forty local NGOs that offered their expertise on a wide range of competencies ranging from the clearing of land mines to protecting the environment.

In addition to their cooperation with the many UN missions, NGOs also act as lobbying groups for various causes. In 2007, for example, thirty-two NGOs issued an open letter "urging" UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to pressure Sudan's reluctant government into permitting a Joint African Union/United Nations Peacekeeping Force to enter the conflict-ridden Darfur region. This example hints at another way in which the UN has increasingly been forced to admit the limits of its own capacities and forge alliances elsewhere. Particularly since the early 1990s, the UN has "subcontracted" peacekeeping tasks to non-UN institutions (such regional organizations as NATO or the African Union) or even to private security companies. In 2001 the latter

even formed their own NGO, the International Peace Operations Association (IPOA), which acts as a public relations lobbying group for firms that in previous times would have been referred to as bands of mercenaries.

This structural complexity also reflects an effort to create an organization that would avoid some of the problems faced by the League of Nations and one that could adapt to the changing international environment as needed. The League had had as many similar organs as the UN. For example, there had been the League Council (an executive committee that resembled the UN Security Council) and the League Assembly (the rough equivalent of the UN General Assembly). The UN's organization was ultimately based on a combination of inherited structures, new challenges, and historical lessons.

The Security Council

The Security Council is the central organ of the entire UN system. It has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. To that effect, the SC was granted wide powers that would make it an active participant in international affairs. It could investigate any dispute or situation that might lead to international friction and it was authorized to decide on economic sanctions or military action. The SC was therefore mandated to use its powers both as a means of preventing a conflict and as a way of enforcing a state's compliance with a specific decision or resolution.

The wide powers granted to the Security Council can be understood as a result of the desire to build a more effective guardian of international peace and security than the League of Nations had been. Few at the time or afterwards have disputed the need for such an organization. But the structure of the SC is not unproblematic. It reflects one of the central tensions that have overshadowed the UN—and often hampered its

Chapter 7 of the UN Charter defines the Security Council's prerogatives. Some of the key articles include:

Article 39

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall make recommendations, or decide what measures shall be taken in accordance with Articles 41 and 42, to maintain or restore international peace and security.

Article 40

In order to prevent an aggravation of the situation, the Security Council may, before making the recommendations or deciding upon the measures provided for in Article 39, call upon the parties concerned to comply with such provisional measures as it deems necessary or desirable. Such provisional measures shall be without prejudice to the rights, claims, or position of the parties concerned. The Security Council shall duly take account of failure to comply with such provisional measures.

Article 41

The Security Council may decide what measures not involving the use of armed force are to be employed to give effect to its decisions, and it may call upon the Members of the United Nations to apply such measures. These may include complete or partial interruption of economic relations and of rail, sea, air, postal, telegraphic, radio, and other means of communication, and the severance of diplomatic relations.

Article 42

Should the Security Council consider that measures provided for in Article 41 would be inadequate or have proved to be

(Continued)

Chapter 7 of the UN Charter (continued)

inadequate, it may take such action by air, sea, or land forces as may be necessary to maintain or restore international peace and security. Such action may include demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations.

Article 43

1. All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security....

effectiveness. In particular, its two-tiered membership organization, which gave disproportionately more power to five of the major victorious powers of World War II, recognized Great Power prerogatives as an important element of the UN Charter. The nation-state and narrow national interests were thus juxtaposed against the universal ideals that were at the foundation of the UN.

The Security Council was initially made up of eleven members (or states), a number that was increased to fifteen in 1965. Of these, five—the United States, Great Britain, France, China, and Russia (until 1991 the Soviet Union)—are permanent members (known as the P-5). The other ten are nonpermanent members, elected by the UN General Assembly for two-year terms. Their selection reflects an effort to find some—but hardly perfect—regional balance: Africa has three seats, while Western Europe and Oceania, Asia, and Latin America and the Caribbean each get two. The last seat is reserved for Eastern Europe. Each year

five of these ten nonpermanent members leave the SC and are replaced.

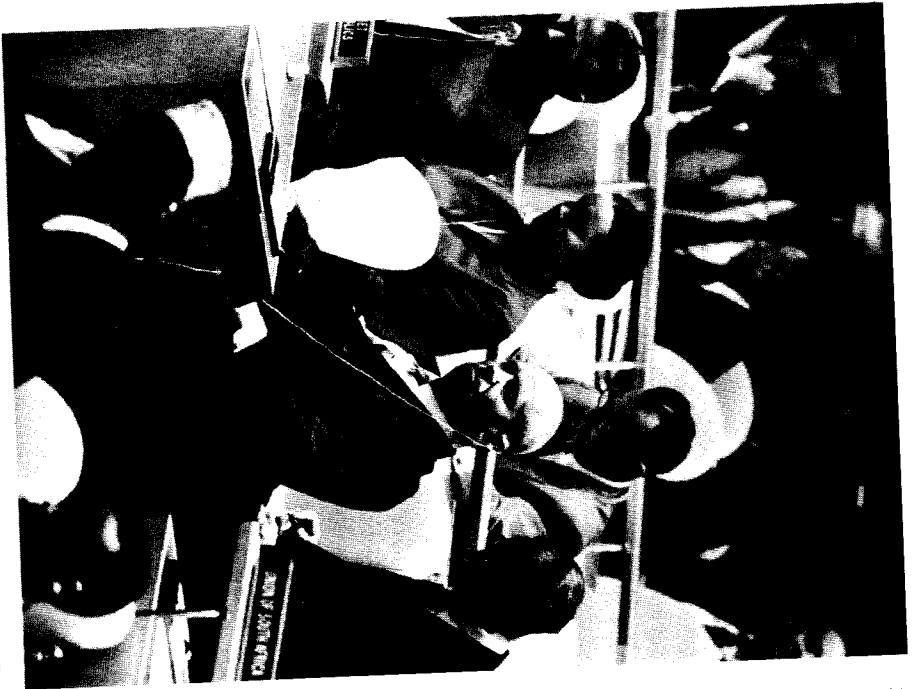
Two key features differentiate the Security Council from the League Council. First, the decisions of the Security Council are binding and require a majority of nine out of fifteen—rather than unanimity as was the case in the League—to be passed. Second, the permanent members are clearly more powerful than the nonpermanent ones: any one of the five can block a decision by using its right of veto. This clause has prompted numerous calls for reform: the five permanent members may have been the “great powers” of 1945; they certainly were the key victorious powers of World War II. This is not automatically the case in the twenty-first century, though. But since the founding of the UN the only major reform has been the increase in the number of nonpermanent members in 1965.

The concentration of power in the hands of five countries has been a subject of criticism in large part because the SC exercises a broad range of powers over the rest of the UN system. For example, the SC can recommend the admission of new member states; it basically chooses the Secretary-General, and, with the GA, it selects the judges of the International Court of Justice.

Faulty or not, the Security Council and its five permanent members simply overshadow all other organs of the UN.

The General Assembly

If the UNSC is where the UN—or those countries that are members of the SC at any given time—usually reacts to the many conflicts around the globe, the General Assembly (GA) is the forum where each of the 193 member states can make its case heard. As the main deliberative organ of the United Nations, it is in many ways akin to a national parliament. Each member state, regardless of its size, has one vote. This arrangement seems to make the GA much like the U.S. Senate, where each of the fifty states is



4. Nikita Khrushchev, premier of the USSR, at a meeting of the UN General Assembly in September 1960. His visit to the UN is best remembered for the day the fiery Soviet leader banged his shoe on the lectern to reinforce his oratory.

represented by two senators regardless of the size of the population or landmass of a given state. The situation is in some ways absurd: the tiny island of Tuvalu with its 11,600 citizens has equal

representation with the People's Republic of China and India, each with more than 1 billion.

The very size of the GA means that its effectiveness is limited. The annual meetings—or regular sessions—that usually open in September have become ritualistic and tend to make news only in connection with a possible high-profile appearance, by the U.S. president, for instance. Indeed, the UNGA has acquired perhaps its most obvious significance as a protest forum for disaffected would-be nations (such as the Palestinians since 1970s).

Its very inclusiveness is the GA's—and more generally the UN's—greatest weakness: with so many members represented, contentious issues have little chance of being affirmatively decided. This is particularly so because decisions on key questions—on peace and security, admission of new members, and budgetary matters—require a two-thirds majority (decisions on other matters are by simple majority). On questions of international security the GA is ultimately subservient to the Security Council and, hence, dependent on consensus among the P-5.

In many ways, the General Assembly functions like a national parliament. It has a president and twenty-one (!) vice presidents. Unlike most national parliaments with their political parties, however, the GA is divided along regional lines. The presidency, for example, rotates each year among five groups of states: African, Asian, Eastern European, Latin American and the Caribbean, and Western European and other states (for example, the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand).

In addition, the GA's work is carried out in a number of committees with a more limited membership. These are charged with dealing with such specific issues as Disarmament and International Security (first main committee); Economic and Financial questions (second); and Social, Humanitarian and Cultural issues (third). As in the case of the presidency and vice presidency, the membership

and chairmanships of the committees is selected on a regional basis. For example, in 2014 the first committee was chaired by a Libyan, the second by a Senegalese, the third by a Bulgarian, the fourth by an El Salvadorian, and so on.

If the SC has remained remarkably static in terms of its rules and membership, the GA is the UN body where the gradual proliferation of member countries—from 51 in 1945 to 193 today—has been most visible. This explosion of membership has affected the UN in a number of important ways, the most important one probably being the crystallization of economic and social development as the key issues on the UN's agenda. It has also affected the work of those who run the organization on a daily basis.

Secretary-General: "the most difficult job on earth"?

The UN Secretariat serves the other principal organs of the United Nations and administers the programs and policies laid down by them. At its head is the Secretary-General, who is appointed by the General Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council for a renewable five-year term. The entire secretariat consists of approximately 9,000 international civil servants working at UN duty stations around the world (mainly in Addis Ababa, Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva, Nairobi, New York, Santiago, and Vienna).

The role of the Secretariat is multifaceted, ranging from public advocacy of various UN causes and the day-to-day administration of its various economic and social programs to crisis diplomacy and overseeing the work of UN peacekeeping forces in the trouble spots of the world. Balancing these tasks while under pressure from the member states has never been easy for this relatively small body of international civil servants who are, after all, citizens of the member states. The work of the Secretariat is, by the sheer composition of the personnel, under constant pressure from the



5. At the airport in Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia, an honor guard escorts Dag Hammarskjöld's body onto a plane for the journey to his hometown in Sweden. Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash in 1961 while trying to resolve a crisis in the Congo.

dyad of nation-state imperatives and universal goals. Can one truly expect that a national of a given country will not use his or her position as a UN functionary to push certain policies that would have a positive impact on his or her native country?

This point has clearly affected the makeup of the Secretariat and the selection of the UN Secretary-General (UNSG). Since 1946 the UNSG has been the public face—as well as the chief administrative officer—of the organization. The post of the UNSG combines enormous visibility and expectations with limited powers. Ideally independent from national prerogatives and above politics, the UNSG and the Secretariat as a whole cannot function without the support of the constituent nation-states, most specifically the five permanent

An impossible hybrid: the structure of the United Nations

members of the Security Council. Because the physical headquarters of the UN are in New York, the UNSG is particularly open to the scrutiny of the American media, making him a subject of partisan wrangling—as well as criticism and disdain—within the most powerful nation-state in the world.

The first UNSG, the Norwegian Trygve Lie, summed up the difficulties of the post when passing the job to the Swede Dag Hammarskjöld in 1953: “Welcome to the most difficult job on earth.” Earlier, Lie—who had had to contend with such difficult issues as the outbreak of the Korean War—had told the press, “I shall take all the troubles of the past, all the disappointments, all the headaches, and I shall pack them in a bag and throw them in the East River.”²

Lie’s successors would be likely to share this cheerful assessment. If anything, the UNSG’s position became even more difficult over succeeding decades as the membership of the UN enlarged and diversified. Yet some of them have left a significant legacy. Dag Hammarskjöld, for example, championed the creation of UN peacekeeping forces, those with the blue helmets who have patrolled the world’s conflict regions over the past half a century. He also helped push economic development to the forefront of the UN’s agenda. To be sure, Hammarskjöld’s tenure coincided with the rapid explosion of UN membership as the decolonization process unfolded in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Personally committed to making the UN a significant player in world affairs, Hammarskjöld did not let the UN become completely hostage to Cold War antagonisms that threatened to expand to the newly independent parts of the globe. Hammarskjöld died in a plane crash in 1961—and thus achieved a martyrdom of sorts—in the midst of the Congo crisis, one of the many conflicts that arose from this process.

Most subsequent Secretaries-General have not enjoyed the same public exposure, in part because the ongoing Cold War and the

UN Secretaries-General

1946–52	Trygve Lie, Norway
1953–61	Dag Hammarskjöld, Sweden
1961–71	U Thant, Myanmar (Burma)
1972–81	Kurt Waldheim, Austria
1982–91	Javier Pérez de Cuéllar, Peru
1992–96	Boutros Boutros-Ghali, Egypt
1997–2006	Kofi Annan, Ghana
2007–	Ban Ki-moon, Republic of Korea (South Korea)

explosion of membership made administering the UN increasingly difficult. The choice of the UNSG also remained a highly sensitive issue; since each of the P-5 had a veto on the matter, the selection resulted in a series of compromises that while spreading the right to hold the post beyond Northern Europe, also produced relatively ineffective UNSGs: the Burmese U. Thant, the Austrian Kurt Waldheim, the Peruvian Pérez de Cuéllar, and the Egyptian Boutros Boutros-Ghali. To be fair, all of these men (and so far all UNSGs have been men) did attempt to maintain the impartiality and high profile of their office as best they could. But Cold War prerogatives and, in the case of Boutros-Ghali, preponderant American influence in the 1990s, doomed any effort to lift the UN’s independent profile.

In the end, the next UNSG to stand out as having left a significant mark on the organization is the Ghanaian Kofi Annan. During his tenure the UN adopted the so-called Millennium Goals, a broad set of guidelines aimed at cutting global poverty in half by 2015. Annan also started and spearheaded a process of incremental reform of the administrative management structure of the UN, aimed at making the UN a more effective organization. But perhaps

most importantly, the soft-spoken and always charming Annan managed to keep the UN's image relatively positive at a time when its relevance—and the integrity of its staff—was increasingly questioned. Like Hammarskjöld, Annan, the first UNSG who was a career UN official, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Still, the last few years of Annan's time in office were hampered by numerous challenges, such as the conflict over the American-led invasion of Iraq, the inability of the UN to forge a quick end to the fighting that erupted on the Israeli-Lebanese border in 2006, and charges of widespread corruption within the UN system (which involved, among others, Annan's own son). To Annan, vacating the UNSG's office in New York upon the arrival of Ban Ki-moon in December 2006 must have been a relief of sorts.

Indeed, the Secretariat and the UNSG's office are hampered by numerous problems, including bureaucratic intransigence, red tape, budgetary shortfalls, and mismanagement. Most significantly, the last six decades have shown the difficulties in maintaining an international staff within a system that makes the Secretariat, like so much of the UN, dependent on the whims of the P-5. Moreover, any effort at streamlining the UN faces a virtually insurmountable challenge in the plethora of organizations that make up the often dysfunctional UN family.

A further difficulty for UN reform efforts stems from its universal membership. Beneath the often high-minded rhetoric at the General Assembly and the Security Council lay layer upon layer of competing national ambitions and agendas. The multinational staff overseen by the Secretary-General is supposed to rise above such pettiness, but in reality this is virtually impossible. At a practical level, the members of the Secretariat bring with them their own cultural and national management styles, work ethics, and cultural preferences that can, in turn, create severe interpersonal conflict and hurt the effectiveness of any given UN bureau or field office. The observance of national and religious holidays—to give a simple example—may

at times coincide with important meetings and conferences. Ironically, finding ways of avoiding intercultural tension is not just one of the mandates stipulated in the UN's Charter; it is part of the daily life within the organization itself.

ECOSOC and the three sisters

Under the UN's mandate, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) "coordinates the economic and social work of the United Nations and the UN family of organizations" and therefore "plays a key role in fostering international cooperation for development." That sounds fine and logical. The SC was charged with weighty issues of military security, leaving ECOSOC to deal with the related questions of economic security. These were not to be taken lightly, for many of the negotiators involved in the drafting of the UN Charter saw the economic depression of the 1930s as the root cause of World War II.

In truth ECOSOC is a relatively powerless part of the UN structure. With fifty-four members representing more than a quarter of the total UN roster of nations, each elected by the General Assembly for three-year terms (on the basis of "equitable geographical representation"), ECOSOC oversees a number of functional (such as Human Rights, Sustainable Development) and regional commissions. The Commission on Human Rights, for example, monitors the observance of human rights throughout the world (and the work of the new Human Rights Council or, before 2006, the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights). Other bodies focus on social development, the status of women, crime prevention, narcotic drugs, and environmental protection. Five regional commissions promote economic development and cooperation in their respective areas. But ECOSOC's mission remains as amorphous as its structure.

In fact, the true global economic power within the UN family lies with the so-called three sisters: the World Bank, the International

Presidents of World Bank*	Managing Directors of IMF
Eugene Meyer, 1946	Camille Gutt (Belgium), 1946-51
John J. McCloy, 1947-49	Ivar Rooth (Sweden), 1951-56
Eugene R. Black, 1949-63	Per Jacobsson (Sweden), 1956-63
George D. Woods, 1963-68	Pierre-Paul Schweitzer (France), 1963-73
Robert McNamara, 1968-81	Johannes Witteveen (Netherlands), 1973-78
Alden W. Clausen, 1981-86	Jacques de Larosiere (France), 1978-87
Barber Conable, 1986-91	Michel Camdessus (France), 1987-2000
Lewis T. Preston, 1991-95	Horst Köhler (Germany), 2000-04
James Wolfensohn, 1995-2005	Rodrigo Rato y Figaredo (Spain), 2004-07
Paul Wolfowitz, 2005-07	Dominique Strauss-Kahn (France), 2007-11
Robert Zoellick, 2007-12	Christine Lagarde (France), 2011-
Jim Yong Kim, 2012-	

* all U.S. citizens

Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Each has its own specific remit. Based in Washington, the World Bank, originally known as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, is a multilateral institution that lends money to governments and government agencies for development projects. The IMF, also located in Washington, lends money to governments to help stabilize currencies and maintain order in international financial

markets. The WTO, headquartered in Geneva, was founded in 1995 to replace the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Its general goal is to lower tariffs and other trade barriers.

Together the three sisters wield tremendous power and influence but also attract criticism as organizations that favor the established free-market system over any possible alternatives. Indeed, the rules of governance within the organizations give certain countries a clear advantage in decision making. At the World Bank and the IMF voting power is weighted based on individual countries' contributions. This means that the United States has (in 2015) approximately 16 percent of the vote while the seven major industrialized countries (G-7: Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United States) together hold about 45 percent. No one country, one-vote principle here! In fact, the biggest "shareholder," the United States, has always held effective veto power over the World Bank and IMF's decisions. The Western dominance over these institutions has been strengthened further by the longstanding tradition of choosing an American as the president of the World Bank, and a European as the managing director of the IMF.

The problem that stems from this structure is evident. The countries that have most at stake—the countries in the developing world that are often in need of World Bank loans or IMF credits—have relatively little power within these institutions. But the programs and policies that are decided upon in Washington often have a tremendous impact throughout the developing world. It is no wonder that the critics of the IMF and the World Bank argue that they represent a new form of Western control over Africa, parts of Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America. (In the last region, former Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez championed the creation of Banco del Sur [Bank of the South], as a way of ridding South America from dependency on World Bank loans and U.S. dominance.)

The WTO (and its predecessor GATT) is seemingly more democratic than its Washington-based sisters. Voting is not weighted. Decisions

are made—or often not made—by consensus (majority voting is possible but has never been used). However, given the broad array of members (almost 80 percent of the total of 160 countries are from the developing world) with different interests and goals, the need to find a consensus inevitably leads to heavy behind-the-scenes bargaining. In such discussions, though, American and European representatives (or the so-called G-7 countries) clearly start from a strong position vis-à-vis, say, countries in Africa. Leverage—economic or political—matters, albeit in a different way as in the context of the IMF or the World Bank.

The basic point is that the WTO yields little power of its own; it is the member states that decide through a lengthy bargaining process over changes in multilateral trading rules. And since some member states ultimately are more equal than others, the WTO, much like its sisters, is often charged with an effort to perpetuate an international economic system dominated by the North.

The United Nations

Programs, funds, specialized agencies

As noted earlier, ECOSOC is responsible for coordinating the social work of the UN. This translates to a loose role as the overseer of a large number of specialized agencies, programs, and funds. Some of these—especially the many humanitarian organizations—are well known and held in high regard. Most everyone would have heard, for example, about the UN International Children's Fund (UNICEF) or the World Health Organization (WHO).

A full listing of all the various organizations—many of which will be discussed in other chapters—would make this book much more than a “very short introduction.” (See chart 2.1.) But it is worth asking: what, aside from the issues they address, differentiates a “Specialized Agency” (like the WHO) from “Programs and Funds” (like UNICEF)?

Part of the answer is simple: money. While Programs and Funds are financed mainly through voluntary contributions from member countries (making their finances chronically uncertain), the Specialized Agencies are funded through a mixture of assessments (i.e., contributions from the overall UN budget) and voluntary contributions. The latter have a baseline budget, the former do not. Some countries are indeed more equal than others at the UN Security Council and the World Bank; but Specialized Agencies are also more equal than Programs and Funds.

The practical consequences of such systemic division are controversial. One is justified in asking, for example, why UNICEF should be required to spend more of its time in fundraising to assist disadvantaged children than the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is required in planning its activities to enhance intercultural understanding? Why does the World Tourism Organization (WTO, not to be confused with the other WTO) enjoy greater stability as a specialized agency than does the office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)? The latter does, after all, address the needs of over 30 million refugees, internally displaced people, and asylum seekers!

These are questions we will revisit in the final chapter of this book. They do, however, point to another basic question related to the UN structure: How much does it all cost?

Footing the bill: who pays and how much?

The popular notion is that the roughly \$25 billion that the various UN operations cost in 2013 make it a prohibitively expensive enterprise. Yet, before coming to this conclusion, one might consider a few salient facts. First, the UN's total budget represents but a fraction of most countries' national budgets; indeed, the UN total expenditures are only slightly higher than those of the country with the highest per capita income in the world, Luxembourg (a population of less than 500,000). This represents less than two percent of the world's military spending.

An impossible hybrid: the structure of the United Nations

UN funding is unduly complex—almost like another Picasso abstraction. In very general terms, however, the UN budget is based on two categories of contributions: assessed (ca. 45 percent in 2014) and voluntary (55 percent). The assessed contributions can, in turn, be divided into three categories according to the end use of the funds:

1. Assessed contributions to the Regular Operating Budget (totaling about \$2.4 billion in 2014)
2. Assessed contributions to UN Specialized Agencies (ca. \$2.6 billion)
3. Assessed contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations (ca. \$8 billion)

The basic rule in “assessing” how much each member country should contribute to the UN is simple: the wealthier the country is, the more it must pay. There is, though, a ceiling for wealthy countries and a minimum for the poorer ones. The maximum contribution for any single country is 22 percent of the entire operating budget. This is what the United States (which represents 23–25 percent of the world economy) contributes. The minimum contribution is 0.001 percent, paid (if not defaulted) by such countries as Laos, Malawi, and Timor-Leste. A similar scale of assessment is used to raise the \$2.6 billion that fund the operations of the various specialized agencies. The largest recipients in this category are the World Health Organization (WHO), Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), UNESCO, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and ILO.

In 2013–14, at 28 percent of the total, the United States is also the largest single contributor to peacekeeping costs. The higher assessment for peacekeeping operations is explained by an important modification: for peace operations the permanent members of the Security Council pay proportionately more than for the regular budget. Conversely, the floor for the least developed countries is even lower than for the regular budget (0.0001 percent).

UN Operating Budget

The major contributors to the UN operating budget of about \$5.5 billion are assessed based on the proportion of their national economy vis-à-vis the size of the global economy. In 2000 the UN lowered the ceiling of these contributions from 25% to 22% of the total budget. In 2013–14 this meant that the top ten contributors to the UN operating budget were ranked as follows.

1. United States	22.00%
2. Japan	10.83%
3. Germany	7.14%
4. France	5.60%
5. UK	5.18%
6. China	5.15%
7. Italy	4.45%
8. Canada	2.98%
9. Spain	2.97%
10. Brazil	2.93%

Some member nations are in arrears on their payments, most notably the United States. The European Union countries contribute roughly 35% of the total operating budget. Special UN programs—such as UNICEF and UNDP—are not included in the regular budget and are financed by voluntary contributions from member governments.

The amount of assessed contributions to the regular budget is set every three years by the General Assembly. In addition to the United States, the other major contributors include Japan, Germany, United Kingdom, France, Italy, Canada, Spain, and China. Indeed, these nine countries combined pay for roughly 75 percent of the entire core budget of the United Nations.

Voluntary contributions were estimated at roughly \$12 billion in 2014. Although most of this goes for the various Programs and

Funds, some of the contributions benefit the work of the various Specialized Agencies (the difference between the funding of UN Programs and Funds as opposed to Specialized Agencies has already been touched upon previously). Exceptions among the Specialized Agencies are the IMF and the World Bank, which are funded and governed outside of the UN system. This, naturally, gives them an added degree of independence (or dependence from the major funding countries). It also makes them far wealthier. The World Bank, for example, had an operating budget of more than \$2 billion in 2012 and approved in 2013 more than \$30 billion in loans and credits to various development projects.

All of this translates into a few uncomfortable facts. First, the UN depends on the contributions of its wealthiest member states, particularly the United States. Second, this dependency gives the "big payers"—especially because most of them are also permanent members of the Security Council—an effective stranglehold on the overall ability of the UN to function at all. Or if it is to function, the wealthy contributors can exercise (perhaps) undue influence on the direction of the UN's policies. Third, the developing countries that are most in need of the UN's assistance are thus indirectly linked via a "dependency chain" to the continued goodwill of the most developed ones.

A penniless hybrid? A dysfunctional family?

The complexity of the UN is its strength and its weakness. While the UN has a body (at least one) or a related organization devoted to almost any imaginable issue, it can be extremely cumbersome when it comes to dealing with specific issues or solving complex problems. There are bureaucratic conundrums. As in any large organization, turf battles within and among different agencies can reach epic proportions. There is duplication of services and, as many critics argue, too much political correctness: an uncalled-for emphasis for satisfying national quotas over actual skills when

making appointment decisions within the various UN organizations.

An additional symptom of the UN's complexity is the uncertainty of funding that hampers its operational abilities. At the very basic level, the UN relies on its wealthiest member states to fund its operations. These contributions are in no case massive (in the case of the United States it represents less than 0.25 percent of the federal budget) and they often come in late, if at all. At the end of 2010 member states owed the UN \$920 million (the United States accounted for 80 percent of this amount). The UN operates, it seems, permanently in the red.

But what has this hybrid, penniless structure achieved since 1945? Where has it been successful? Where has it failed? How can it be improved? Is there sense of discussing it as anything other than a Picasso abstraction?

An impossible hybrid: the structure of the United Nations