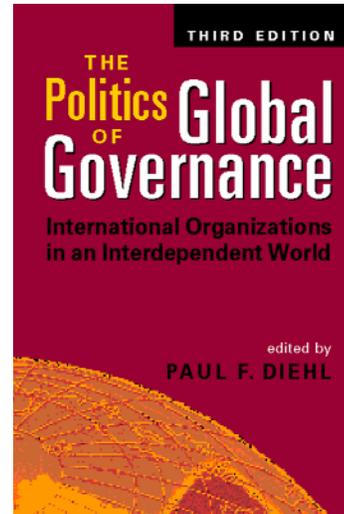# The Politics of Global Governance:
International Organizations
in an Interdependent World
3RD EDITION

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i

Part 1

Introduction

THERE ARE TWO predominant views of international organizations among the general public. The first is a cynical view that emphasizes the dramatic rhetoric and seeming inability to deal with vital problems that are said to characterize international organizations and the United Nations in particular. According to this view, mirrored in some realist formulations, international organizations should be treated as insignificant actors on the international stage. The other view is an idealistic one. Those who hold this view envisage global solutions to the major problems facing the world today, without recognition of the constraints imposed by state sovereignty. Most of the naive calls for world government are products of this view. An understanding of international organizations and global governance probably requires that neither view be accepted in its entirety, nor be wholly rejected. International organizations are neither irrelevant nor omnipotent in global politics. They play important roles in international relations, but their influence varies according to the issue area and situation confronted.

This book is designed to provide a balanced view of international organizations. Toward this end, the selections in this collection dispel a number of myths. Narrow views about how international organizations make decisions or respond to conflict are called into question. An understanding of international organizations requires knowledge of how, where, and why they operate. Only then can we learn to recognize their limitations as well as their possibilities. We begin the study of international organizations by briefly tracing the origins of the present United Nations system.

The League of Nations was formed following World War I, and it represented an attempt at international cooperative efforts to prevent war. The breakdown of the League system in the 1930s was the product of many factors, although the failure of will by the major powers of the era and the unwieldy requirements for concerted action certainly were the primary causes. As with most experiments, the initial results were far from ideal, but the total effort gives some basis for optimism. In the case of the League of Nations, it was not able to prevent World War II, but it did provide a means for cooperation and consultation among states on a variety of issues not confined to security matters, although this was the major purpose for which it was created.

It is, therefore, perhaps not surprising that world leaders sought to form another general international organization at the conclusion of World War II. The occurrence of war has generally had a stimulating effect on the development of international organizations in the modern era.[1] What may be surprising to some is the similarity between the League of Nations and

its successor, the United Nations.[2] The Security Council and the General Assembly of the United Nations had comparable antecedents under the League system. Furthermore, the United Nations was also predicated on the assumption that continued cooperation among the victorious coalition in the previous war would ensure global stability. One might think that given the League experience, the United Nations would suffer similar setbacks. Although the United Nations and its affiliated agencies have not achieved most of the goals set out in its charter, neither have they been insignificant in dealing with many of the most pressing problems in the world. This can be attributed to the radically differing environments faced by the League and the United Nations.

After 1945, the international system was structured in a bipolar fashion, with each superpower retaining an interest in maintaining its status. Consequently, there was little pressure from the rapid systemic upheaval that characterized the periods prior to the world wars. This does not imply that conflict has abated; rather, such conflict has been more limited and less threatening to the international system or the existence of the United Nations. Second, there seemed to be a greater recognition of a need for cooperation among states. The ideas behind the United Nations are not new ones, but the prospects of global devastation from nuclear war or environmental disaster were sufficient to prompt a greater commitment to international organizations. It has become clear that various problems, such as pollution, hunger, and nuclear proliferation, are not amenable to action by only one or several states.

Finally, the United Nations acquired a symbolic importance that the League of Nations lacked. States feel obligated to justify their actions before the main bodies of the United Nations, even when they may appear contrary to the charter principles. As the United States did during the Cuban missile crisis, states may use the United Nations as a means to legitimize their actions or policy positions.[3] Most important, however, states are exceedingly hesitant to withdraw from membership in the United Nations, even when that organization's actions appear contrary to their national interests. Such reluctance prevents the debilitating loss of significant actors that plagued the League during most of its existence.

The end of the Cold War (now conventionally designated as 1989) signaled a new era for the United Nations and international organizations in general. On the one hand, the end of the superpower rivalry removed many of the barriers that had heretofore prevented the United Nations from taking action, especially in the security realm. The United Nations supported global military action against Iraq in the First Gulf War, the first such global collective enforcement effort since the Korean War. The United Nations also authorized far more peacekeeping operations in the decade and a half that followed the end of the Cold War than in the forty-five years that pre-

ceded it; many of these new operations took on functions such as humanitarian assistance, nation building, and election supervision that previously were not within the province of UN peacekeeping. On another front, the European Union took further notable steps toward complete economic integration, and other nascent regional economic blocs, such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) entity and that formed under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), took shape.

The prospects for expanding the roles, functions, and powers of international organizations in global governance seemed bright at the beginning of the 1990s. Yet a series of events underscored the problems and limitations of international organizations as they entered the twenty-first century. The enhanced ability of the UN Security Council to authorize new peacekeeping missions did not necessarily translate into greater effectiveness in halting armed conflict or promoting conflict resolution. The United Nations was largely ineffective in stopping the fighting in Bosnia, could not produce a political settlement in Somalia, and was too slow to prevent genocide in Rwanda. It has played little or no role in the U.S. invasion of Iraq, both during and afterward. Despite its successes, the European Union stumbled badly in its peace efforts toward Bosnia, and attempts at further integration and expanded membership have produced significant domestic and foreign political controversies. Other organizations, such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), now struggle with the new environment and the redefinition of their roles as their original purposes have been significantly altered or rendered obsolete. Nevertheless, international organizations in the twenty-first century play a greater role than they ever have in history. Yet we are still reminded that state sovereignty and lack of political will by members inhibit the long-term prospects of those organizations for creating effective structures of global governance.

The United Nations and its affiliates are the most significant international organizations, but they are hardly the only ones. In the past century, the number of international organizations grew substantially. Although definitions and estimates may vary, the total number of all types of international organizations (governmental and nongovernmental) may now exceed twenty or thirty thousand. The list includes a wide range of memberships and purposes, and they vary in significance from the Inter-American Tropical Tuna Commission to the World Bank.

One method of classifying international organizations is according to their membership potential and scope of purpose.[4] International organizations can either be designed for universal membership, potentially including all states in the world, or the membership may be limited, as are many regional organizations. We may also classify international organizations according to the breadth of their concerns. Specific purpose organizations may be confined to one problem, such as the South East Asia Treaty

Organization (SEATO) Medical Research Laboratory, or one issue area, such as the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), whereas general purpose organizations are concerned with a variety of problems in several issue areas. Most international organizations are nongovernmental entities in the limited membership, specific purpose category.

The only universal, general purpose organization (and its affiliated agencies)—the United Nations—receives a disproportionate amount of attention in this volume. The United Nations and its agencies remain the centerpiece among international organizations in the security realm and play prominent roles in most other issue areas. Although the United Nations is centrally important, any treatment of international organizations and global governance would be incomplete without a consideration of the thousands of other international organizations throughout the world. Over the past decade, two other types of international organizations have played increasingly important roles in global governance: nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), such as the International Red Cross, and regional organizations, such as the European Union. Accordingly, included here are articles that demonstrate how NGOs and regional organizations form webs or networks that intersect, replace, or supplement those IO webs composed primarily of global intergovernmental organizations such as the United Nations.

Part 1 offers an overview of international organizations. The first article in this collection, by Jon Pevehouse, Timonthy Nordstrom, and Kevin Warnke, provides a general overview of the growth of international governmental organizations (IGOs) over the past two centuries. There has been a dramatic increase in such organizations, most notably those that are cross-regional and involving European states. Nevertheless, the rate of increase is slowing and there are still regions of the world (e.g., Africa) that have considerably less involvement in international organizations than might be predicted.

Why are international organizations created? Kenneth Abbott and Duncan Snidal tackle the fundamental question of why states pursue their interests through formal international organizations rather than through other diplomatic channels such as bilateral agreements. The authors argue that two of the characteristics of international organizations—centralization and independence—allow them to perform various functions more efficiently. The remaining sections of that chapter illustrate how international organizations can perform a number of functions, including norm creation and arbitration of disputes, often to promote global community values. A much more pessimistic view of international organizations is presented by John Mearsheimer. He examines international institutions from the perspectives of leading theoretical approaches to international relations, including liberalism and critical theory. Mearsheimer notes a series of logical flaws

and empirical irregularities in those formulations. He concludes that a "realist" theory view of institutions, namely that they have little effect on state behavior, is the most accurate. In several ways, the Abbott/Snidal and Mearsheimer articles reflect the predominant and opposite views of international organizations noted above.

Part 2 details the decisionmaking processes of international organizations. The range of activities and the bureaucratic actors and processes that are often hidden from public view are revealed in these selections. Furthermore, proposals to change the most visible aspect of decisionmaking—voting—are assessed. After the first two parts, the reader will have a broad view of the place of international organizations in the world system and the patterns of their activities. Armed with this understanding, the reader is directed to the actions of international organizations in three major issue areas: peace and security, economic, and social and humanitarian. In Parts 3 through 5, one can appreciate the number of organizations involved, the scope of activities undertaken, and the variation in effectiveness across organizations and issue areas. While the first three parts highlight common patterns in international organizations, the next three parts provide more details and reveal the diversity of these bodies.

Part 3 explores the effectiveness of collective security and peacekeeping operations, but also considers the changes that the end of the Cold War has wrought. That series of events has led intervention strategies to include attempts to rebuild war-torn states; articles address each of these concerns. The economic issue area, addressed in Part 4, is one of great importance especially to many underdeveloped countries. One article shows the different perspectives on how to change the current method of global governance with respect to global financial issues. Articles on the World Trade Organization (WTO), development organizations, and regional economic organizations illustrate how international institutions have played a role in creating the structure of international finance, trade, and development, how they have adapted (or not) to changing demands, and how they paradoxically may both enhance and mitigate the dependence of poorer countries on their wealthier counterparts. Part 5, on humanitarian activities, shows the interface of many organizations in a variety of important concerns, including the status of women, environmental protection, and humanitarian relief. Part 6 returns to the more general concerns addressed at the outset of the book: What roles can international organizations play in global governance? The first chapter in this section addresses what kinds of reforms might be possible in the UN system given its seemingly continuous focus on reform proposals and actual implementations that fall short. The collection concludes with an essay that traces the evolution of the UN system, seeking insights from its past to understand how it might develop in the future.

Notes

1. See J. David Singer and Michael Wallace, "International Government Organizations and the Preservation of Peace, 1816–1964," *International Organization* 24 (1970): 520–547.

2. For a definitive comparison, see Leland Goodrich, "From League of Nations to United Nations," *International Organization* 1(1947): 3–21.

3. Ernst Haas, "Collective Legitimization as a Political Function of the United Nations," *International Organization* 20 (1966): 36–379.

4. Harold Jacobson, *Networks of Interdependence,* 2nd edition (New York: Random House, 1984), pp. 11–13.