CHAPTER 18

International Organization and the United Nations

'More than ever before in human history, we share a common destiny. We can master it only if we face it together.'

KOFI ANNAN, 'Message for the New Millennium' (1999)

PREVIEW

The growth in the number and importance of international organizations has been one of the most prominent features of world politics, particularly since 1945. Some of these are high profile bodies such as the United Nations, the World Bank, the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund, while others are lesser known but still play key roles in particular fields. By providing a framework for cooperative problem-solving amongst states, international organizations have modified traditional power politics without, at the same time, threatening the emergence of a global or regional superstate. However, the phenomenon of international organization also raises a number of important questions. For example, what factors and forces help to explain the emergence of international organizations? Do such bodies genuinely reflect the collective interests of their members, or are they created by and for powerful states? To what extent can international organizations affect global outcomes? Many of these questions, however, are best addressed by considering the case of the world's leading international organization, the United Nations. The UN (unlike its predecessor, the League of Nations) has established itself as a truly global body, and is regarded by most as an indispensable part of the international political scene. Its core concern with promoting international peace and security has been supplemented, over time, by an ever-expanding economic and social agenda. Has the UN lived up to the expectations of its founders, and could it ever? What factors determine the effectiveness of the UN, and how could it be made more effective?

KEY ISSUES

- What is international organization?
- Why are international organizations created?
- What have been the implications of the growth in international organization?
- How effective has the UN been in maintaining peace and security?
- What impact has the UN had on economic and social issues?
- What challenges confront the UN, and how should it respond to them?

CONCEPT

International organization

An international organization (sometimes called international governmental organizations or IGOs, as opposed to international non-governmental organizations, or INGOs) is an institution with formal procedures and a membership comprising three or more states. International organizations are characterized by rules that seek to regulate the relations amongst member states and by a formal structure that implements and enforces these rules. Nevertheless, international organizations may be viewed as instruments, arenas or actors (Rittberger and Zangl 2006). As *instruments*, they are mechanisms through which states pursue their own interest. As *arenas*, they facilitate debate and information exchange, serving as permanent institutions of conference diplomacy. As *actors*, they enable states to take concerted action, which requires some measure of 'pooled' sovereignty (see Approaches to international organization, p. 437).

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Rise of international organization

The earliest embryonic international organizations were created after the Napoleonic Wars. These included the Congress of Vienna (1814–15), which established the Concert of Europe which continued until WWI. The number and membership of such organizations gradually increased during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 49 of them being in existence in 1914. Following the end of WWI, just as after the Napoleonic Wars, there was a surge in new international organizations. By 1929 and the onset of the world economic crisis, their number had reached an inter-war peak of 83. The end of WWII marked a new boom, with the number of international organizations soaring to 123 by 1949, with new organizations including the United Nations (see p. 449) and the institutions of the Bretton Woods system (examined in Chapter 19). This reflected not only an awareness of growing interdependencies amongst states, linked to concerns over power politics, economic crises, human rights violations, developmental disparities and environmental degradation, but also the emerging hegemonic role of the USA, which saw the pursuit of US national interests and the promotion of international cooperation as mutually sustaining goals. By the mid-1980s, the total number of international organizations had reached 378, with the average membership per organization standing at over 40 (compared with 18.6 in 1945 and 22.7 in 1964). Although their number subsequently declined, largely due to the dissolution of Soviet bloc organizations at the end of the Cold War, this masks a substantial growth in international agencies and other institutions, as the number of bodies spawned by international organizations themselves has continued to grow. However, international organizations take a wide variety of forms. The most common bases for categorizing international organizations are the following:

- *Membership* – whether they have a restricted or universal membership.
- *Competence* – whether their responsibilities are issue-specific or comprehensive.
- *Function* – whether they are programme organizations or operational organizations.
- *Decision-making authority* – whether they are examples of intergovernmentalism (see p. 459) or supranationalism (see p. 458).

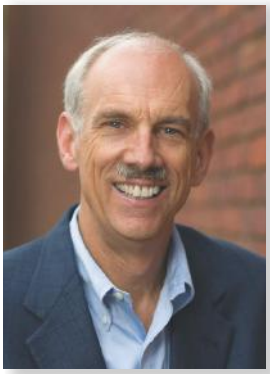
The significance of the phenomenon of international organization has nevertheless been hotly disputed. For instance, while some see international organizations as little more than mechanisms for pursuing traditional power politics by other means, others claim (or warn) that they contain the seeds of supranational or world government (see p. 457). The relationship between international organization and global governance (see p. 455) has also been the subject of debate. Although the rise of international organization is sometimes seen as evidence of the emergence of a global governance system, global governance is a wider and more extensive phenomenon than international organization. In particular, global governance encompasses a range of informal as well as formal processes and also involves a wider array of actors, including national governments, non-

governmental organizations (NGOs) (see p. 6), citizens' movements, transnational corporations (TNCs) (see p. 99) and global markets. Nevertheless, international organizations are often a key, if not *the* key element in global governance arrangements, in that the process of cooperative problem-solving that lies at the heart of global governance is usually facilitated by international organizations (Weiss and Kamran 2009). In that sense, international organizations are the vital formal or institutional face of global governance. (The nature of global governance is discussed at greater length in Chapter 19.)

Why are international organizations created?

There has been much political and academic debate about the forces and processes through which international organizations have been brought into being. The political debate reflects disagreements between liberals, realists and others about, amongst other things, whether the impulse to create international organizations stems from the collective interests of states generally, or primarily from powerful states or even a regional or global hegemon (see Hegemonic stability theory, p. 229). Such disagreements have profound implications for the nature and legitimacy of international organizations. Liberals argue that international organizations tend to reflect the collective interests of states, based on a recognition of what Keohane and Nye (1977) called 'complex interdependence' (see p. 8) and an awareness of mutual vulnerabilities that affect powerful and weak states alike. International organizations therefore operate essentially as neutral umpires or referees, capable of standing above, and even, to some extent, imposing order on, the incipient power politics of the state-system. Realists, by contrast, argue that power politics operates in and through international organizations, which are viewed more as appendages of the state-system, or simply as instruments controlled by powerful states, and do not constitute a separate (and perhaps morally superior) realm. The relationship between international organizations and power politics is also reflected in debate between neorealists and neoliberals over whether states are primarily concerned with 'relative' gains or 'absolute' gains.

Nevertheless, there is a further range of debates about the motivations and processes through which integration and institution building at an international level has been brought about. Three main theories have been advanced: federalism, functionalism and neofunctionalism. Federalism (see p. 128) refers to a territorial distribution of power through which sovereignty (see p. 3) is shared between central (national or international) bodies and peripheral ones. From the federalist perspective, international organizations are a product of conscious decision-making by the political elites, usually seeking to find a solution to the endemic problems of the state-system, and especially the problem of war. If war is caused by sovereign states pursuing self-interest in a context of anarchy, peace will only be achieved if states transfer at least a measure of their sovereignty to a higher, federal body. Functionalism, by contrast, views the formation of international organizations as an incremental process that stems from the fact that a growing range of government functions can be performed more effectively through collective action than by individual states. Integration is thus largely determined by a recognition of growing interdependence in economic and other areas. As David Mitrany (1966) puts it, 'form follows functions', in which 'form'



Robert Keohane (born 1941)

US international relations theorist. With his long-time collaborator, Joseph S. Nye (see p. 215), Keohane questioned some of the core assumptions of realist analysis in *Transnational Relations and World Politics* (1971), highlighting the increasing importance of non-state actors and of economic issues in world affairs. In *Power and Interdependence: World Politics in Transition* (1977) Keohane and Nye set out the theory of 'complex interdependence' as an alternative to realism, based on the trend towards international cooperation and the growing significance of international regimes. Since the publication of *After Hegemony* (1984), however, Keohane has attempted to synthesize structural realism and complex interdependence, creating a hybrid dubbed either 'modified structural realism' or 'neoliberal institutionalism'. His other major works include *International Institutions and State Power* (1989) and *Power and Interdependence in a Partially Globalized World* (2002).

represents institutional structures and 'functions' denotes the key activities of government. Such thinking was, in due course, revised by the idea of neofunctionalism, which sought to explain how international cooperation tends to broaden and deepen through a process of **spillover**. As these theories of institution building have largely been developed as a means of explaining the process of regional integration, and sometimes specifically European integration, they are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 20.

THE UNITED NATIONS

From the League to the UN

The United Nations is, without doubt, the most important international organization created to date. Established though the San Francisco Conference (April–June 1945), it is the only truly global organization ever to be constructed, having a membership of 192 states and counting. The principal aims of the UN, as spelled out by its founding Charter, are as follows:

- To safeguard peace and security in order 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war'
- To 'reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights'
- To uphold respect for international law
- To 'promote social progress and better standards of life'

However, the UN was not the first organization that was constructed to guarantee world peace; its predecessor, the League of Nations, had been founded at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 (see p. 59) with very similar goals, namely to enable **collective security**, to arbitrate over international disputes and to bring about disarmament. The League of Nations was inspired by US President Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points, established as the basis for long-term peace in post-WWI Europe (see Woodrow Wilson, p. 438). The League, nevertheless,

● **Spillover**: The dynamic process whereby integration in one policy area tends to 'spill over' into other areas, as new goals and new pressures are generated.

● **Collective security**: The idea or practice of common defence, in which a number of states pledge themselves to defend each other, based on the principle of 'all for one and one for all' (see p. 440)

Focus on . . .

Relative or absolute gains?

How much scope is there for international cooperation between and amongst states? This has long been an issue of debate between realists and liberals, the former believing that the struggle for power leaves little or no scope for cooperation between states, while the latter hold that cooperation can triumph over conflict because of an underlying harmony of interests amongst states. Since the 1980s, this issue has particularly divided neorealists and neoliberals, but the terms of the debate have changed. Neorealists have insisted that states are preoccupied with making 'relative' gains (improvements in a state's position relative to other states). In this view, anarchy makes states fear for their survival, and because power is the ultimate guarantor of survival, they constantly monitor their position in the international power hierarchy. Countries will only be prepared to cooperate if they believe that cooperation will bring about relative gains, and they will forego cooperation if they fear that their gains will be less than those of other countries. Country A would thus refuse to enter into a trade agreement with country B, even though it is likely to bring profit, if it calculates that country B's profits will be greater. Power, in this sense, is zero-sum game – one state's gain is another state's loss.

Neoliberals, on the other hand, argue that the neorealist position is simplistic. While not rejecting the concerns about relative gains (because they accept assumptions about state egoism), they hold that states may be more concerned about making 'absolute' gains (improvements in a state's position in absolute terms). This may occur, for instance, because states are confident about their survival and so can be more relaxed about their power relative to other states; because they judge that other states' intentions are peaceful regardless of their relative capabilities; or because, in reality, states have multiple relationships with multiple states, making calculations about relative gains simply impractical. If states are prepared to cooperate so long as this promises to deliver absolute gains, the scope for cooperation at an international level is considerable.

suffered from major defects, which the later architects of the UN tried to take fully into account. In particular, the League never genuinely lived up its name; it was never properly a 'league of nations'. Some major states did not join, most notably the USA, through the refusal of the isolationist Congress to ratify US membership, while others left. Germany joined in 1926, only to leave after the Nazis came to power in 1933. Japan abandoned the League in 1933 after criticism of its occupation of Manchuria, while Italy walked out in 1936 after criticism of its invasion of Abyssinia. The Soviet Union, which entered the League in 1933, was expelled in 1939 following its attack on Finland. Moreover, the League lacked effective power. It could only make recommendations, not binding resolutions; its recommendations had to be unanimous; and anyway, no mechanism existed for taking military or economic action against miscreant states. As a result, the League of Nations stood by, largely powerless, as Germany, Italy and Japan embarked on aggressive wars during the 1930s and the events that would lead to the outbreak of WWII unfolded (as examined in Chapter 2).

It was no coincidence that the League of Nations and the United Nations were both set up in the aftermath of world wars. The key goals of both organizations were the promotion of international security and the peaceful settlement of disputes. In the case of the UN, this occurred in a context of an estimated

APPROACHES TO . . .

INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Realist view

Realists are deeply sceptical about international organizations. They view such bodies as largely ineffective, and also question their authority. The weakness of international organizations derives from the fact that international politics continues to be characterized by a quest for power amongst all states, reflected in the pursuit of relative gains. If world politics is shaped by a struggle for power rather than a harmony of interests, there is little scope for the levels of cooperation and trust that would allow international organizations to develop into meaningful and significant bodies. In addition, the growth of international organizations is usually deemed to be undesirable because of its implications for sovereignty. Any form of international organization therefore tends to erode the authority of the nation-state. However, realists do not completely discount the role of international organizations. Neorealists, for example, have drawn attention to the relationship between international organization and hegemony (see p. 221). As hegemonic states possess such superior power, they are the only states that can tolerate the relative gains of other states so long as they are making absolute gains themselves. The effectiveness of international organizations is therefore closely linked to the emergence of a global hegemon – the UK in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the USA since 1945 and, more particularly, since 1990. Nevertheless, the disproportionate burden that such powers shoulder may contribute to their long-term decline.

Liberal view

Liberals have been amongst the most committed supporters of international organizations. This is reflected in the ideas of liberal institutionalism. From the institutionalist perspective, states cooperate because it is in their interest to do so. This does not imply that state interests are always harmoniously in agreement, but only that there are important, and growing, areas of mutual interest where cooperation amongst states is rational and sensible. International organizations are therefore a reflection of the extent of interdependence in the global system, an acknowledgement by states that they can often achieve more by working together than by working separately. In areas of mutual interest, states' desire to make absolute gains usually wins out over concerns about relative gains. Neoliberal institutionalists, nevertheless, acknowledge that the existence of complex interdependence among states does not automatically result in the creation of international organizations. Cooperation may be hard to achieve when, despite the existence of common interests, states feel they have an incentive to defect from an agreement or fear that other states may defect. One of the purposes of international organizations is therefore to reduce the likelihood of this happening, by both building trust between and amongst states and accustoming them to rule-governed behaviour. As such considerations apply to all states, regardless of where they stand within a hierarchy of power, liberals question the realist belief that successful international institutions require the participation of a hegemonic state.

Critical views

Social constructivists challenge both neorealist and neoliberal accounts of international organization on the grounds that, despite their differences, they assume that states are rational actors guided by objective interests. This discounts the role of ideas and perceptions. The state-system is an arena of inter-subjective interaction. Levels of cooperation within the international system therefore depend on how states construe their own identities and interests as well as the identities and interests of other states. These, moreover, change due to membership of, and interactions that take place within, international organizations, meaning that international organizations themselves are essentially ideational constructs. Other critical theories advance critiques of international organization that stress the degree to which international structures reflect, and, to some extent, exist to consolidate, the wider inequalities and imbalances of the global system. Frankfurt critical theorists, for example, emphasize that bodies such as the World Bank (see p. 373) and the IMF (see p. 469) have internalized a neoliberal agenda, and so act in the interests of global capitalism. Feminists, for their part, highlight the gendered construction of international organizations, reflecting both the traditional domination of elite men and the internalization of masculinist ideas and policy approaches. In this respect, green politics is often an exception. Many greens looked to international organization, and even some form of world government, to provide a solution to the 'tragedy of the commons' (see p. 388).

Woodrow Wilson (1856–1924)

US President, 1913–21. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Wilson was the president of Princeton University, 1902–10, before serving as the Democratic Governor of New Jersey, 1911–13, and being elected President in 1912. Wilson initially kept the USA out of WWI, but felt compelled to enter the war in April 1917 to make the world 'safe for democracy'. Wilson's idealistic internationalism, sometimes called 'Wilsonianism', was most clearly reflected in the Fourteen Points he laid out in a speech to Congress in January 1918, as the basis for an enduring peace. These expressed the ideas of national self-determination, open agreements and an end to secret diplomacy, freedom of trade and navigation, disarmament and collective security achieved through a 'general association of nations'. Wilsonian liberalism is usually associated with the idea that a world of democratic nation-states, modelled on the USA, is the surest means of preventing war.

civilian and military death toll of around 67 million and the radical dislocation of global and national economies in WWII, to say nothing of the Great Depression which had contributed to a significant sharpening of international tensions during the 1930s. The early origins of the UN, indeed, emerged during the war itself, taking the form of an alliance of 26 states which pledged themselves to defeat the Axis powers through the Declaration of United Nations on 1 January 1942. As with the League, the USA took a leading role in the process, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt pushing for the creation of the UN during the final years of the war. The basic blueprint for the new international organization was drawn up in August 1944 at Dumbarton Oaks, Washington DC, by delegates from the USA, the Soviet Union, China and the UK. The UN Charter was signed in San Francisco on 26 June 1945, with the UN officially coming into existence on 24 October (since known as UN Day).

The UN is a sprawling and complex organization, described by its second Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, as 'a weird Picasso abstraction'. Its size and complexity has enabled the UN to respond to myriad interests and to address an ever-widening global agenda, but it has also resulted in an organization that is highly cumbersome, often conflict-ridden and, some say, is doomed to inefficiency. At its heart, the UN is a hybrid body, configured around competing concerns: the need to accept the realities of great power politics and to acknowledge the sovereign equality of member states. This has created, in a sense, two UNs, one reflected in the Security Council, the other in the General Assembly. The Security Council is the most significant UN body. It is responsible for the maintenance of international peace and security, and is dominated by the P-5, its permanent veto powers – the USA, Russia (until 1991, the Soviet Union), China (until 1971, the Republic of China or 'Taiwan'), the UK and France. The General Assembly, on the other hand, is a deliberative body that represents all members of the UN equally. Whereas the Council is criticized for being poorly representative and dominated by great powers (see Reforming the Security Council? p. 450), the Assembly, in a sense, is over-representative, a highly decentralized body that often serves as little more than a propaganda

Focus on . . .

How the United Nations works

The Security Council: This is charged with the maintenance of international peace and security, and so is responsible for the UN's role as negotiator, observer, peacekeeper and, ultimately, peace enforcer. The Council has the power to pass legally-binding resolutions, to suspend or expel members, to impose economic sanctions and to take military action to maintain or restore peace and security. The Security Council has 15 members. The Big Five (or P-5) – the USA, Russia, China, the UK and France – are permanent 'veto powers', meaning that they can block decisions made by other members of the Council. The other 10 members are non-permanent members elected for two years by the General Assembly, in line with an established, if imperfect, regional balance.

The General Assembly: This is the main deliberative organ of the UN, sometimes dubbed the 'parliament of nations'. The Assembly consists of all members of the UN, each of which has a single vote. The Assembly can debate and pass resolutions on any matter covered by the Charter, and has a specific responsibility to examine and approve the UN's budget, determine the members' contributions, and elect, in conjunction with the Security Council, the UN Secretary-General and the judges of the International Court of Justice. Important decisions in the Assembly must be carried by a two-thirds majority, but, crucially, these decisions are recommendations rather than enforceable international law. The Assembly neither has a legislative role nor does it oversee or scrutinize, in any meaningful sense, the Security Council or the Secretariat.

The Secretariat: This services the other principal organs of the UN and administers the programmes and policies laid down by them. Although its main activities are located in the UN's headquarters in New York, it has offices all over the world and a total staff of about 40,000. At its head is the Secretary-General, who functions as the public face of the UN as well as its chief administrative officer. Appointed by the Assembly on the recommendation of the Security Council for a five-year, renewable term, the Secretary-General deals with a multifaceted bureaucracy staffed by civil servants from myriad states and cultures, and tries to maintain the UN's independence, often in a context of rivalry amongst P-5 states. Nevertheless, Secretaries-General have some capacity to influence the status and policy direction of the organization.

Economic and Social Council: This consists of 54 members elected by the General Assembly. Its chief role is to coordinate the economic and social work of the UN and the UN family of organizations. This involves overseeing the activities of a large number of programmes, funds and specialized agencies. These include the so-called 'three sisters' – the World Bank, the IMF and the WTO – and also bodies such as the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The expansion of the UN's economic and social institutions occurred largely along functionalist lines, bodies being created or further developed as specific economic and social problems emerged.

arena. This division between the two bodies became increasingly clear from the 1960s onwards as a result of the growing influence of newly independent, developing countries in the Assembly, and the effective retreat of the P-5 to the Council. However, by no means do these two bodies make up the entirety of the UN. In addition to the Secretariat, the UN family consists of a sprawling range of funds, agencies and programmes that are responsible, at least in theory, to the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC).

CONCEPT

Collective security

Collective security is the theory or practice of states pledging to defend one another in order to deter aggression or to punish a transgressor if international order has been breached. Its key idea is that aggression can best be resisted by united action taken by a number of states, this being the only alternative to the insecurity and uncertainty of power politics. Successful collective security depends on three conditions. First, the states must be roughly equal, or at least there must be no preponderant power. Second, *all* states must be willing to bear the cost and responsibility of defending one another. Third, there must be an international body that has the moral authority and political capacity to take effective action.

Promoting peace and security

Banishing the 'scourge of war'?

The principal aim of the UN is 'to maintain international peace and security' (Article 1), with responsibility for this being vested in the Security Council. Indeed, the performance of the UN can largely be judged in terms of the extent to which it has saved humankind from deadly military conflict. This, nevertheless, is difficult to judge. On the one hand, the fact that the two world wars of the twentieth century have not been followed by World War III has sometimes been seen as the supreme achievement of the UN (as well as demonstrating a clear advance on the performance of the League of Nations). On the other hand, realist theorists in particular have argued that the absence of global war since 1945 has had little to do with the UN, being more a consequence of the 'balance of terror' that developed during the Cold War as a nuclear stalemate developed between the USA and the Soviet Union. Ultimately, how global and regional conflict would have developed and whether 'cold' wars would have become 'hot' ones in the absence of the UN, is an unanswerable question. It is, nevertheless, evident that the UN has only had limited and intermittent success in establishing a system of collective security that can displace a reliance on violent self-help.

The capacity of the UN to enforce a system of collective security is severely limited by the fact that it is essentially a creature of its members: it can do no more than its member states, and particularly the permanent members of the Security Council, permit. As a result, its role has been confined essentially to providing mechanisms that facilitate the peaceful resolution of international conflicts. Even in this respect, however, its record has been patchy. There have been undoubted successes, for example in negotiating a ceasefire between India and Pakistan in 1959, maintaining peace in 1960 in the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) and mediating between the Dutch and the Indonesians over West Irian (New Guinea) in 1962. However, for much of its history, the UN was virtually paralyzed by superpower rivalry. The Cold War ensured that, on most issues, the USA and the Soviet Union (the P-2) adopted opposing positions, which prevented the Security Council from taking decisive action.

This was compounded by two other factors. First, the use by the P-5 of their veto powers dramatically reduced the number of threats to peace and security or incidents of aggression that the Security Council could take action over. In practice, until the People's Republic of China replaced Taiwan in 1971, voting in the Security Council on controversial issues generally resulted in a clash between the Soviet Union and the other members of the P-5 (the P-4). During the Cold War, the Soviet Union was the most frequent user of the veto, exercising it on no fewer than 82 occasions between 1946 and 1955. After first using its veto in 1970, however, the USA has assumed this role. Second, despite the provision in the UN Charter for the setting-up of the Military Staff Committee as a subsidiary body of the Security Council, resistance amongst the P-5 has prevented the UN from developing its own military capacity. This has meant that when the UN has authorized military action it has either been subcontracted, for example, to US-led forces (Korean War and Gulf War) or to regional bodies such as NATO (Kosovo) or the African Union (Darfur), or it has been carried out by a multinational force of so-called 'blue helmets' or 'blue berets' contributed by member

states. Thus one of the key conditions for an effective collective security system – the availability of permanent UN troops to enforce its will – has remained unfulfilled.

During much of the Cold War, then, the UN was characterized by deadlock and paralysis. The only occasion on which the Security Council agreed on measures of military enforcement was in relation to the Korean War in 1950, but the circumstances surrounding this were exceptional. UN intervention in Korea was only possible because the Soviet Union had temporarily withdrawn from the Council, in protest against the exclusion of 'Red China' (the People's Republic of China). This intervention, anyway, merely fuelled fears that the UN was western-dominated. The only times that non-military enforcement measures were employed were against two international pariahs, Rhodesia and South Africa. Economic sanctions were imposed on Rhodesia in 1966, on the grounds that the white minority regime's unilateral declaration of independence constituted a threat to peace. An arms embargo was imposed on the apartheid regime in South Africa in 1977, following the suppression of unrest in black townships the previous year. Otherwise, war and conflict proceeded essentially without UN involvement. The Suez crisis of 1956 was significant because, although the UK and France used their vetoes for the first time, to block a US resolution condemning Israeli, British and French action, diplomatic pressure from the USA and Soviet support for the Nasser regime quickly brought about a humiliating withdrawal. This demonstrated that some members of the P-5 were clearly more equal than others. During the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, as the world grew close to nuclear war, the UN was a powerless spectator. It was also unable to prevent the Soviet invasions of Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979), or to curtail the USA's escalating military involvement in Vietnam during the 1960s and 1970s. Similarly, the UN had only a very limited influence on the succession of Arab–Israeli wars (see Key events: The Arab–Israeli conflict, p. 202).

The end of the Cold War was the beginning, many hoped, of a new chapter for the UN. For so long marginalized by superpower antagonism, the UN suddenly assumed a new prominence as the instrument through which an effective system of collective security could be brought about. For instance, the use by the P-5 of their veto power declined significantly, only being used 13 times between 1996 and 2006. The UN's intervention in the Gulf War of 1991, being only the second time (after Korea) that the UN authorized large-scale military action, seemed to demonstrate a renewed capacity to fulfil its obligation of deterring aggression and maintaining peace, as did the USA's decision not to pursue fleeing Iraqi troops into Iraq for fear of acting outside the authority of the UN. Indeed, a new era of UN activism appeared to be a major component of the 'new world order', as announced by President Bush Snr. Since 1990, the Security Council has approved non-military enforcement measures on numerous occasions – for instance, in relation to Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Haiti, Iraq, Rwanda, Somalia, the former Yugoslavia and so on – and measures of military enforcement, usually linked to **peacekeeping** operations (as discussed in the next section), have become much more common.

● **Peacekeeping:** A technique designed to preserve the peace when fighting has been halted, and to assist in implementing agreements achieved by the peacemakers (see p. 444)

However, early hopes for a UN-dominated 'new world order' were quickly disappointed. This was evident not only in sometimes high-profile peacekeeping failures, as in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, but, most significantly, in the USA's decision to go ahead with the invasion of Iraq in 2003, despite opposition

- The United Nations is a misnamed organization. As all representation at the UN is through national governments, its members are clearly not 'nations' but 'states'. Apart from the obvious problem with the alternative title – The 'United States' – the stress on 'nations' implies the participation, or at least consent, of peoples or national populations, and not just of their leaders. It suggests, indeed, that the national governments that comprise the UN are popularly-based, when, in fact, the existence of sustainable democracy has never been a criterion for membership of the UN, and would, if ever applied, substantially reduce the size of the UN (as well as cause deep conflict over the meaning of 'democracy').

Deconstructing . . .

'UNITED NATIONS'

- The notion that the members of the UN are 'united' also raises questions. United nations would act with a single voice and on the basis of common interests. The term implies that at the heart of the UN is a cosmopolitan project, reflected in the desire to construct an organization that would in some way stand *above* national interests and concerns. Not only is this unrealistic (as the UN is very much a creature of its members, and the UN Charter firmly enshrines a commitment to national sovereignty) but it may also be thought to be undesirable (as it suggests that the UN is a proto-world government).

from leading members of the Security Council. During the post-Cold War period, the UN has been forced to confront a range of new problems and conflicts. These include the reluctance of states whose security is no longer threatened by East–West rivalry to commit resources to the cause of collective security or for the defence of states on the other side of the globe. Moreover, the emergence of what seemed to be unipolar world order threatened to sideline the UN just as effectively as did Cold War bipolarity (see p. 216). The Iraq War in some ways demonstrated the emergence of the 'P-1'. Finally, the international political focus has itself shifted. The UN's role used to be to keep the peace in a world dominated by conflict between communism and capitalism. Now it is forced to find a new role in a world structured by the dynamics of global capitalism, in which conflict increasingly arises from imbalances in the distribution of wealth and resources. This has meant that the UN's role in promoting peace and security has been conflated with the task of ensuring economic and social development, the two being merged in the shift from 'traditional' peacekeeping to 'multidimensional' or 'robust' peacekeeping.

GLOBAL POLITICS IN ACTION . . .

The UN and Iraq

Events: The Gulf War was precipitated by the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. The UN Security Council subsequently condemned the invasion and demanded the withdrawal of Iraqi troops (Resolution 660), placed economic sanctions on Iraq (Resolution 661) and set a deadline for Iraq's unconditional withdrawal from Kuwait (Resolution 665). Saddam's failure to comply with these resolutions led to Operation Desert Storm, a US-led military operation which was launched in February 1991 with the participation of 30 countries. In only four days of fighting the Iraqi troops were defeated and Iraqi forces had been pushed back over the border. An official ceasefire was signed in April 1991, in which Saddam agreed to abide by all of the UN resolutions.

Nevertheless, US pressure on Saddam Hussein's Iraq intensified after 9/11. In the context of the 'war on terror' (see p. 223), the Bush administration viewed Iraq as a member of the 'axis of evil'. After more than a decade of UN sanctions, Iraq was reportedly continuing to develop weapons of mass destruction. In November 2002, a Security Council resolution gave Iraq a 'final opportunity to comply with its disarmament obligations' (Resolution 1441). However, attempts by the USA, the UK and Spain to get approval for a second Security Council resolution that more clearly authorized military action by highlighting Iraq's non-compliance with Resolution 1441 failed. In this context, the USA and a 'coalition of the willing' invaded Iraq in March 2003, although the motivations for the invasion were complex and contested (see p. 131).

Significance: The UN's involvement with Iraq illustrates both its strengths and weaknesses in maintaining international peace and security in the post-Cold War era, but also the extent to which the effectiveness of the UN is determined by the wider international climate. The 1991 Gulf War appears to be as good an example of collective security as the world has seen. This was reflected both in Security Council authorization for 'Desert Storm' and in the determination of the USA not to act beyond UN resolutions, particularly by refusing to pursue fleeing Iraqi troops over the border and trying to topple the Saddam regime. This was clearly made possible by the end of the Cold War and the emergence of greater trust and unanimity amongst the P-5. Nevertheless, as in the case of the Korean War, Security Council agreement over the Gulf War was achieved in exceptional circumstances. The Soviet Union adopted a highly conciliatory position in a context of economic crisis and deepening internal tensions that would shortly lead to the collapse of communist rule and the break-up of the Soviet empire. The UN's reliance on US military leadership also underlined the UN's lack of an independent military capacity and its reliance on the sole surviving superpower. Some have also argued that the Gulf War reflected US national interests, and, further, helped to give the USA greater military self-confidence, preparing the ground for the adoption, over time, of a more unilateralist foreign policy stance.

This unilateralism was dramatically demonstrated by the USA's 2003 invasion of Iraq. Indeed, the then UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, declared explicitly that, as the invasion had not been sanctioned by the Security Council, and was not in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter, it was a clear breach of international law. The Iraq War demonstrated how the UN could be reduced to the role of a bystander in a world dominated by a hegemonic USA. Nevertheless, although the bypassing of the UN dealt the organization a significant blow to its standing, there is no reason to believe that this would prove to be permanent. Unilateral US action taken without UN authorization and against the opposition of key P-5 states undoubtedly weakened the USA's 'soft' power. Arguably, it also proved to be counter-productive in combating militant Islam across the Muslim world. It was noticeable that in his second term in office, George Bush was more interested in cultivating support within the UN for his Iraq policy, a position that was further advanced by President Obama from 2009 onwards.

CONCEPT

Peacekeeping

Peacekeeping is defined by the UN as 'a way to help countries torn by conflict create conditions for sustainable peace'. It is therefore essentially a technique designed to preserve the peace, however fragile, where fighting has been halted, and to assist in implementing agreements achieved by the peacemakers. 'Traditional' or classical peacekeeping amounts to monitoring and observing the peace process in post-conflict situations, with peacekeepers being deployed after a ceasefire has been negotiated and with no expectation of fighting except in the case of self-defence. This form of peacekeeping is consensual and requires the consent of the host state, its advantage being that the ability to report impartially on adherence to a ceasefire builds trust between previously warring states or groups.

From peacekeeping to peace-building

The term 'peacekeeping' is not found in the UN Charter. Nevertheless, over the years, peacekeeping has come to be the most significant way in which the UN has fulfilled its responsibility to maintain international peace and security. Falling somewhere between the UN's commitment to resolve disputes peacefully through means such as negotiation and mediation (Chapter Six) and more forceful actions to maintain security (Chapter Seven), peacekeeping was described by the second UN Secretary-General, Dag Hammarskjöld, as belonging to 'Chapter Six and a Half'. Between 1948 and 2009, the UN carried out 63 peacekeeping operations. In 2009, 16 of them remained active, involving 80,000 troops, almost 11,000 uniformed police and about 2,300 military observers, drawn from 117 countries. In addition, the UN's peacekeeping operations were supported by about 6,000 international civilian personnel, 13,000 local civilian personnel and over 2,000 volunteer workers. During 2008–09 the budget for UN peacekeeping operations was about $7.1 billion.

Classical or 'first generation' UN peacekeeping involved the establishment of a UN force placed between the parties to a dispute once a ceasefire had been implemented. In 1948, UN peacekeepers were used to monitor the truce after the first Arab–Israeli War, and the following year a UN military observer group was deployed to monitor the ceasefire in the Kashmir region following large-scale killings that had occurred in the aftermath of the partition of India and Pakistan. The despatching of a 6,000-strong multinational peacekeeping force to act as a physical barrier between Israel and Egypt following the Suez crisis of 1956, and to facilitate the withdrawal of UK and French forces from the area, is often viewed as the prototype of 'first generation' peacekeeping. The 'blue helmets' only remained with the agreement of host states, and their purpose was to provide a shield against future hostilities rather than to resolve the deeper sources of the conflict or enforce a permanent settlement. In a context of East–West rivalry, a strict reliance on neutrality and impartiality, monitoring post-conflict situations rather than influencing them, appeared to be the only way in which the UN could contribute to the maintenance of peace.

However, the traditional approach to peacekeeping became increasingly unsustainable in the post-Cold War period, especially as the number of UN peacekeeping operations increased significantly. This increase came about both as a result of an upsurge in civil strife and humanitarian crises of various kinds, a consequence, in part, of the fact that declining superpower influence allowed ethnic and other divisions to rise to the surface, and of a new-found unanimity on the Security Council that created a bias in favour of intervention. No less importantly, the task of peacekeeping became more complex and difficult due to the changing nature of violent conflict. As interstate war became less frequent and civil war became more common, more conflicts were entangled with ethnic and cultural rivalries and endemic socio-economic divisions. This was reflected in two developments from the 1990s onwards. First, as peacekeepers were increasingly being dispatched to conflict zones in which violence remained an ongoing threat, if not a reality, there was greater emphasis on 'robust' peacekeeping, sometimes portrayed as **peace enforcement**. Second, as conflict situations became more complex, there was a recognition, over time, that the design and focus of peacekeeping operations had to keep up. This led to the advent of

● **Peace enforcement:** Coercive measures, including the use of military force, used to restore peace and security in situations where acts of aggression have taken place.

CONCEPT

Peace-building

Peace-building is a long-term process of creating the necessary conditions for sustainable peace by addressing the deep-rooted, structural causes of violent conflict in a comprehensive manner. Strictly speaking, peace-building is a phase in the peace process that occurs after peacemaking and peacekeeping have been completed. However, these activities invariably overlap to a greater or lesser degree, meaning that peace-building resembles what is often called multi-dimensional peacekeeping. Peace-building as long-term conflict resolution involves a wide range of strategies, economic, political and social as well as military. These include the following: economic reconstruction, repairing or improving the economic and social infrastructure, de-mining, the demobilization and retraining of former combatants, the reintegration of displaced peoples, establishing community organizations, and revising governmental arrangements or 'state-building'.

'multi-dimensional' peacekeeping, which includes, in addition to implementing a comprehensive peace agreement, the use of force to achieve humanitarian ends, the provision of emergency relief and steps towards political reconstruction. The emphasis therefore shifted from peacekeeping to peace-building.

Does UN peacekeeping work?

How successful has multidimensional peacekeeping in the post-Cold War period been? UN peacekeeping has been both effective and cost-effective when compared with the costs of conflict and the toll in lives and economic devastation (Collier and Hoeffler, 2004). A study by the Rand Corporation in 2007 which analyzed eight UN-led peacekeeping operations determined that seven of them had succeeded in keeping the peace and six of them had helped to promote democracy (Dobbins 2007). These cases included the Congo, Cambodia, Namibia, Mozambique, El Salvador, East Timor, Eastern Slavonia and Sierra Leone. However, there have been a number of peacekeeping failures, notably in Rwanda, Somalia and Bosnia. UN peacekeepers were little more than spectators during the genocidal slaughter in Rwanda in 1994. UN-backed US intervention in Somalia led to humiliation and withdrawal in 1995, with warlord conflict continuing unabated. The Bosnian-Serb military in 1995 carried out the worst mass murder in Europe since WWII in the 'safe area' of Srebrenica, which had been under the protection of a UN battalion of Dutch peacekeepers. Some have seen such events as evidence of the pitfalls of intervention in alien places lacking civil order and legitimate political institutions. Others, nevertheless, argue that they highlight flaws and failings within the UN system. Failings on the ground have included the lack of a clear mission, and especially serious gaps between the mandate for intervention and the security challenges confronting peacekeepers, the varying quality of peacekeeping forces and a confused chain of command, and a general reliance on 'deterrence by presence', reflected in a reluctance to use force in the face of peace-breakers who use force freely and criminally. Failings at a higher level have been associated with a lack of political will, and conflicting priorities and agendas, in the Security Council and amongst other member states.

However, there is also evidence that the UN has learned lessons. Ever since the 1992 UN report, *An Agenda for Peace*, there has been an acknowledgement that peacekeeping alone is not enough to ensure lasting peace. The growing emphasis on peace-building reflects a desire to identify and support structures that will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict, helping to establish 'positive' peace. Although the military remain the backbone of most peacekeeping operations, the many faces of peacekeeping now include administrators and economists, police officers and legal experts, de-miners and electoral observers, and human rights monitors and specialists in civil affairs and governance. In 2005, the UN Peacebuilding Commission was established as an advisory subsidiary body of the General Assembly and the Security Council. Its purpose is to support peace efforts in countries emerging from conflict, by bringing together all relevant actors (including international donors, the international financial institutions, national governments and troop-contributing countries), marshalling resources, and advising on and proposing integrated strategies for post-conflict peace-building and recovery.

Although, being advisory, the Peacebuilding Commission can accomplish little through its own efforts, the greater emphasis within the UN on peace-building is an acknowledgement that classical peacekeeping is effectively obsolete and that peace enforcement is always difficult and may only be possible under specific conditions (see Is humanitarian intervention justified? p. 328). Peace-building, however, is a holistic exercise that straddles the UN 'harder' and 'softer' sides, its concern with promoting peace and security fusing with its commitment to economic and social development.

Promoting economic and social development

From the outset, the architects of the UN recognized the interconnectedness of economic and political issues. This largely reflected an awareness of the links between the economic turmoil of the Great Depression and the rise of political extremism and the growth of international conflict The UN Charter thus committed the organization to promoting 'social progress and better standards of life'. However, in its early phase, the UN's concerns with economic and social issues extended little beyond post-war reconstruction and recovery, in Western Europe and Japan in particular. A major shift in favour of the promotion of economic and social development was nevertheless evident from the 1960s onwards. This was a consequence of three factors. First, and most importantly, the process of decolonization and the growing influence of developing states within the ever-expanding UN focused more attention on the unequal distribution of wealth worldwide. The North–South divide (see p. 360) thus came to rival the significance of East–West rivalry within the UN. Second, a greater awareness of interdependence and the impact of globalization from the 1980s onwards meant that there was both an increased acceptance that economic and social problems in one part of the world have implications for other parts of the world, and that patterns of poverty and inequality are linked to the structure of the global economy. Third, as acknowledged by the transition from peacemaking to peace-building, the rise of civil war and ethnic strife underlined the fact that peace and security, on the one hand, and development, justice and human rights (see p. 304) on the other, are not separate agendas.

The UN's economic and social responsibilities are discharged by a sprawling and, seemingly, ever-enlarging array of programmes, funds and specialized agencies, supposedly coordinated by ECOSOC. Its main areas are human rights (discussed in Chapter 13), development and poverty reduction (discussed in Chapter 15) and the environment (discussed in Chapter 16). As far as development is concerned, the principal vehicle responsible for global development policy is the UN Development Programme (UNDP), created in 1965. The UNDP has a presence in some 166 countries, working with them on their own solutions to global and national development challenges; it also helps developing countries attract and use aid effectively. Annual Human Development Reports (HDRs) focus the global debate on key development issues, providing new measurement tools (such as the Human Development Index or HDI), undertaking innovative analysis and often advancing controversial policy proposals. By focusing on the notions of 'human development' (see p. 356) and 'human security' (see p. 423), the UNDP has also fostered innovative thinking about poverty and deprivation, moving away from a narrowly economic defini-

KEY EVENTS . . .

History of the United Nations

1944	Dumbarton Oaks conference (the USA, the Soviet Union, the UK and China) sets down the general aims and structure of the future UN.
1945	UN Charter approved in San Francisco by 50 states (Poland was not represented but signed the Charter later to become one of UN's 51 original members).
1946	Trygve Lie (Norway) appointed Secretary-General.
1948	Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted.
1950	Security Council approves military action in Korea.
1950	UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) established.
1953	Dag Hammarskjöld (Sweden) appointed Secretary-General.
1956	First UN peacekeeping force sent to the Suez Canal.
1960	UN operation in the Congo established to oversee the transition from Belgian rule to independence.
1961	U Thant (Burma) appointed Secretary-General.
1964	UN peacekeepers sent to Cyprus.
1965	UN Development Programme (UNDP) founded.
1968	General Assembly approves the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT).
1971	People's Republic of China replaces the Republic of China (Taiwan) at the UN Security Council.
1972	First UN environment conference is held in Stockholm, leading to the establishment of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP).
1972	First UN conference on women in Mexico City, inaugurates International Women's Year.
1972	Kurt Waldheim (Austria) appointed Secretary-General
1982	Javier Pérez de Cuéllar (Peru) appointed Secretary-General
1990	UNICEF convenes the World Summit for Children.
1992	Boutros Boutros-Ghali (Egypt) appointed Secretary-General
1992	The 'Earth Summit' in Rio approves a comprehensive plan to promote sustainable development.
1992	Security Council issues 'An Agenda for Peace', highlighting new approaches to peacemaking, peacekeeping and peace-building.
1997	Kofi Annan (Ghana) appointed Secretary-General
2000	General Assembly adopts the Millennium Development Goals.
2002	International Criminal Court (ICC) established.
2005	UN Peacekeeping Commission is established.
2007	Ban Ki-moon (South Korea) appointed Secretary-General.

tion of poverty. In 1994, Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali issued *An Agenda for Development* (to complement *An Agenda for Peace*, two years earlier), which attempted to establish a coordinated programme for sustainable development (see p. 390) in an era of globalization and in the light of the end of the Cold War.

However, by the late 1990s, concerns about deepening global inequality, and especially the plight of sub-Saharan Africa, produced growing anxiety about the impact of the UN's development programmes. The 1999 *Human Development Report*, for example, noted that while the top fifth of the world's people in the richest countries enjoyed 82 per cent of the expanding export trade, the bottom fifth enjoyed barely more than 1 per cent (UNDP 1999). The desire to reinvigorate the UN's Development Programme led to the unveiling in 2000 of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) (see p. 374). These set a target of 2015 for, among other things, halving extreme poverty, halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education. The UN's 2009 progress report on the achievement of the MDGs concluded that overall progress had been too slow for most of the targets to be met by 2015, particularly in view of global economic and food crises. Despite frustrations and difficulties, it is nevertheless clear that the UN has done more than any other organization or single state to alleviate the economic and social problems of developing countries (Hanhimäki 2008).

Future of the UN: challenges and reform

The UN is no stranger to controversy and criticism. Given the breadth and audacity of the UN's core mission, a gap between expectations and performance is inevitable. However, the nature of the challenges facing the organization has changed significantly over time. How will the UN fare as the twenty-first century unfolds? The major factor that shapes the influence that the UN wields is the global distribution of power. For much of the twentieth century the UN was hamstrung by Cold War bipolarity. The high point of its influence came in the early to mid-1990s, and coincided with a relatively brief period of cooperation and agreement among P-5 states following the end of the Cold War. This, nevertheless, left the UN heavily dependent on the sole remaining superpower, the USA, creating the danger that US hegemony would render the UN a mere tool of US foreign policy, to be used, abused or ignored as Washington saw fit. On the other hand, the growing trend towards multipolarity (see p. 230), reflected, in particular, in the rise of China but also in the growing influence of powers such as India, Brazil and South Africa, is certain to have an impact on the UN. The nature of this impact is difficult to determine, however. In one view, a more even distribution of global power is likely to favour multilateralism and encourage states to rely more heavily on a system of collective security, facilitated by the UN, rather than on violent self-help. In the alternative view, multipolarity is likely to be associated with increased conflict and greater instability, in which case the future history of the UN may replicate that of the League of Nations, as intensifying great power rivalry makes the task of international mediation and negotiation increasingly difficult and perhaps impossible. In either event, the shifting location of global power is certain to keep the issue of the reform of the Security Council firmly on the agenda (see p. 450).

GLOBAL ACTORS . . .

THE UNITED NATIONS

Type: Intergovernmental organization • **Established:** 1945 • **Location:** New York
Membership: 192 countries

The United Nations was established as the successor to the League of Nations when 50 states met in San Francisco to agree the terms of the UN Charter. The UN has five major organs (see How the UN works, p. 439):

- The General Assembly.
- The Security Council.
- The Secretariat.
- The International Court of Justice.
- The Economic and Social Council.

The UN family also includes a range of specialized agencies, funds and programmes, including the IMF, the World Bank, the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF).

Significance: The United Nations is a genuinely global body that has a unique international character. On the basis of its founding Charter, the organization can take action, in theory, in an unlimited range of areas. The UN is active in areas such as the environment, refugee protection, disaster relief, counter-terrorism, disarmament, human rights, economic and social development and so on. However, its key role is widely accepted to be the maintenance of international peace and security, particularly as carried out through the Security Council's ability to issue binding resolutions, backed up, at least in theory, by the ability to impose non-military and military sanctions in the event of non-compliance. This makes the UN the primary source of international law (see p. 332).

During the Cold War, the UN was routinely paralyzed by superpower rivalry that led to deadlock in the Security Council, a consequence of the veto powers of its permanent members. A further difficulty was that the UN was never able to develop an armed force of its own, so that it has always had to rely on troops supplied by individual member states. Its impact on matters of peace and security was therefore strictly limited. The end of the Cold War, however, produced optimism about the capacity of an activist UN to preside over a 'new world order'. The UN approved the US-led expulsion of Iraq from Kuwait in the Gulf War of 1991, and, in a few short years, the number of UN peacekeeping operations had doubled, and the annual budget for peacekeeping had quadrupled. Hopes for a more effective UN in the post-Cold War period were, however, dashed, largely by a declining willingness of states, freed from East–West tensions, to accept neutral, multilateral intervention, and by the eroding support, both financial and military, of the USA. Despite some genuine successes in peacekeeping (such as in Mozambique and El Salvador) and in peace-building (East Timor), the UN's reputation was badly damaged by its failure to prevent large-scale slaughter in Rwanda and Bosnia in the mid-1990s.

The UN nevertheless continues to exert significant 'soft' power, particularly in the developing world, where it is viewed as the leading institution providing support for economic and social development. The UN remains the only international organization that approximates to a form of global governance, providing, at minimum, a framework through which the international community can address concerns ranging from peace and security, disarmament and non-proliferation to environmental protection, poverty reduction, gender equality and emergency relief. In view of the UN's unique role and moral authority, few would disagree with the view that if it did not exist it would need to be invented. However, the UN has been subject to a variety of criticisms. Most damningly, the UN has been portrayed as entirely non-legitimate, a proto-world government that has no democratic credentials and which, over time, has come to pay less respect to national sovereignty. Others claim that it is little more than a debating society, due to the fact that it can do no more than its member states, and particularly the P-5, allow it to do. Further criticisms focus on the convoluted and deeply bureaucratic nature of the organization itself, and its tendency towards inefficiency and mismanagement, exposed not least by the 2003 Oil-for-Food scandal.

Focus on . . .

Reforming the UN Security Council?

Why has there been pressure to reform the UN Security Council? And why has such reform been so difficult to bring about? Calls for the reform of the Security Council focus on two key, if interrelated, issues: the veto powers of its permanent members, and their identity. Permanent membership and the power to veto Council decisions means that the UN is dominated, as far as the core issue of peace and security is concerned, by great power politics. Some UN members are clearly more equal than others. The requirement of unanimity amongst P-5 states has also effectively neutered the UN as the basis for collective security, apart from exceptional circumstances (Korea and the Gulf War). Moreover, the membership of P-5 is widely seen to be outdated, reflecting the great powers of the immediate post-1945 period, not even the superpower politics of the Cold War period. If the Council is to have permanent members, few would challenge the right of the USA, China or Russia (at least in terms of its nuclear capability) to be among them, but France and the UK have long ceased to be states of first-ranking status. At different times, cases have been made out for the inclusion of Japan and Germany, in view of their economic strength, and, more recently, for emerging powers such as India, Brazil, Nigeria, Egypt and South Africa. Certainly, the existing membership reflects a regional imbalance, with no representation for Africa or for Latin America among its permanent members. The case for a revised membership is that a more representative and up-to-date Council would enjoy wider support and influence, helping to make the UN a more effective peacemaker and peacekeeper.

However, the prospect of the reform of the Security Council is remote, with the veto being the major obstacle standing in the way. Veto status could not be removed without the unanimous agreement of the P-5 states, and it is unlikely that any of them would voluntarily abandon their privileged position. Moreover, the continued existence of permanent veto powers is, anyway, a (possibly vital) way of ensuring that the UN retains the support of the world's leading states. The enlargement or change in membership of the P-5 is also difficult to bring about. In the first place, it is highly likely to be opposed, and blocked, by existing P-5 states, especially the most vulnerable ones, France and the UK. Other P-5 members may also fear the different configuration of interests and influences that a reformed Council might bring about. Furthermore, there is significant resistance outside the P-5 to the candidacy of particular would-be members. For example, many European states oppose the inclusion of Germany; South Africa opposes the inclusion of Nigeria and vice versa; Argentina opposes the inclusion of Brazil, and so on. Finally, a revised membership may require the introduction of regular membership reviews, as the distribution of global power is always changing.

A further issue is that the security challenges facing the modern UN are vastly different from those in earlier decades. Amongst other things, these include the threat of nuclear terrorism, the problem of state collapse and the disruption caused by the spread of infectious diseases. The changing nature of war and armed conflict raises particular difficulties for the UN in its peacekeeping and peace-building roles. Not only do the rise of identity wars and the links between civil strife, humanitarian and refugee crises and endemic crime make sustainable peace difficult to achieve, but they also strain the relationship between the quest for global justice and respect for state sovereignty. The case of Darfur, in the 2000s, shows how UN intervention to keep the peace and provide humanitarian aid can be blocked by an unwilling host government. Nevertheless, if the UN

Debating . . .
Is the UN obsolete and unnecessary?

The UN has long been a controversial body. Although for almost six decades the states that comprise the UN have come to value and need the organization, major and sometimes fundamental criticisms continue to be levelled at the United Nations and its composite bodies.

FOR

A proto-world government. The UN is fundamentally flawed because it was designed as a supranational body whose role is to police the international system. The UN therefore has all the drawbacks of a would-be world government – a lack of legitimacy, accountability and democratic credentials. Not only does the UN interfere in the affairs of nation-states (as is demonstrated by its declining support for state sovereignty), but it also disrupts the workings of the balance-of-power system, thereby endangering peace and stability.

Irrelevant debating society. For many, the chief problem with the UN is its ineffectiveness rather than its capacity to meddle in world affairs. As is commonly pointed out, there have been more wars since the creation of the UN than there had been before, and the organization is routinely sidelined as major world events unfold. The Security Council is commonly paralyzed by the difficulty of passing resolutions and achieving both regional acceptance and the support of the USA before action can be taken.

Lack of moral compass. In this view, the UN, at its creation, had a clear moral focus, derived from the fight against fascism: the need to defend human rights and fundamental freedoms. However, as the UN expanded and became a genuinely global body, it drifted towards a kind of moral relativism in which it seeks to be all things to all members. The UN's record on standing up to dictators, condemning human rights violations and intervening to prevent genocide and other comparable acts is therefore poor.

Outdated and unreformable. There is common agreement that the UN is in pressing need of reform, but it is not clear that such reform can be brought about. The reform of the Security Council is impossible to achieve because of the veto powers of its permanent members. The organization itself is simply dysfunctional – sprawling and complex and fraught with duplication and overlaps. Moreover, attempts to streamline the organization seem to make matters worse not better.

AGAINST

An indispensable body. For all its flaws and failings, one central fact must be borne in mind: the world is a safer place with the UN than it would be without it. Although the UN will never be able to prevent all wars and resolve all conflicts, it provides an indispensable framework for cooperation, should the international community choose to use it. The UN serves, however imperfectly, to increase the chances that international conflict can be resolved without the resort to war and, if war breaks out, that military conflict will quickly lead to peacemaking and peace-building.

Peacekeeping successes. Highly-publicized peacekeeping 'failures' have distorted the image of the UN's effectiveness in keeping the peace. Most studies show that UN peacekeeping operations are more often successful than unsuccessful. At an operational level, there are clearly functions that the UN is better at performing than any other body, including small-scale peacekeeping, the provision of humanitarian aid and the monitoring of elections. The shift towards multidimensional peacekeeping has also been beneficial.

New agendas and new thinking. The UN did not fossilize around its initial mission, but it has, rather, succeeded in adapting and redefining itself in the light of new global challenges. Not only has the UN developed into the leading organization promoting economic and social development worldwide, but it has also helped to shape the agenda as far as new global issues are concerned, ranging from climate change and gender equality to population control and dealing with pandemics.

Mend it, don't end it. Despite its imperfections, it is absurd to suggest that the UN is unreformable. The operational and strategic approach to peacekeeping and the provision of humanitarian aid have both improved significantly in recent years, and further reforms could undoubtedly be introduced. For example, UN agencies could be better coordinated; the UN could confer legitimacy on international action, rather than always implementing action itself; and relationships with regional organizations could be strengthened.

accepts a 'responsibility to protect', it is difficult to see where intervention will end. The UN, in addition, faces a continuing problem of who will foot the bill for its activities. While UN peacekeeping, development and other activities tend, remorselessly, to expand, major donor states have become more reluctant to keep up with their financial contributions, partly using these as levers to influence policy within the organization. At the end of 2006, member states owed the UN $2.3 billion, with the USA accounting for 43 per cent of this amount. How can the UN put its finances on a sounder footing without curtailing necessary work, and how can the link between budgetary contributions and policy influence within the UN be broken?

In the light of these challenges, the issue of UN reform has become increasingly prominent. In the late 1990s, the then Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, embarked on an overarching reform programme which aimed to improve the coordination of the UN's economic and social arrangements and to strengthen the norms of the multilateral system. However, most would argue that this process remains incomplete and needs to be applied to a much broader range of UN activities. However, other important areas of reform are in peace operations, development and human rights. The 2000 Brahimi Report on Peacekeeping made a major contribution to reviewing UN peace operations, and provided the backdrop for the creation of the UN Peacebuilding Commission in 2005. An area of particular concern has been the need for the UN to have a 'rapid deployment capacity', the ability to send peacekeepers to different corners of the globe at short notice with the resources to act swiftly and effectively. The absence of such a capacity has often meant that UN peacekeepers are deployed late and are called upon to police highly difficult situations. The chief reform challenge facing the UN's development activities continues to be how to improve coordination and reduce overlaps and duplication amongst the plethora of development-orientated bodies within the UN's 'dysfunctional family'. The goal of 'delivering as one' has been recognized within the UN, but the task of translating this into practice, in order to increase efficiency and reduce administrative costs has yet to be achieved. In relation to human rights, the UN has been highly successful in creating a detailed body of international human rights legislation, and also in producing bodies that can observe and authoritatively report on adherence to global human rights norms. However, given the range of interests that operate in and through the UN, it has been less easy to ensure that these bodies act in a robust way. The much criticized Commission on Human Rights may have been replaced by the Human Rights Council, but as its unwillingness to criticize Sri Lanka in 2009 for the conduct of its civil war against the Tamil Tigers demonstrated, serious human rights violations can still escape sanction.

SUMMARY

- An international organization is an institution with formal procedures and a membership comprising three or more states. These bodies can be thought of as instruments through which states pursue their own interests, as arenas that facilitate debate, and as actors that can affect global outcomes.
- International organizations are created out of a composite of factors. These include the existence of interdependencies among states which encourage policy-makers to believe that international cooperation can serve common interests, and the presence of a hegemonic power willing and able to bear the costs of creating, and sustaining, an international organization.
- The United Nations is the only truly global organization ever constructed. The UN is nevertheless a hybrid body, configured around the competing need to accept the realities of great power politics and to acknowledge the sovereign equality of member states. This, in effect, has created the 'two UNs'.
- The principal aim of the UN is to maintain international peace and security, with responsibility for this being vested in the Security Council. However, the UN has been restricted in carrying out this role particularly by the veto powers of the P-5 and the lack of an independent military capacity. The UN's mixed performance in the area of peacekeeping has led to an increasing emphasis instead on the process of peace-building.
- The UN's economic and social responsibilities are discharged by a sprawling and, seemingly, ever-enlarging array of programmes, funds and specialized agencies. Its main areas are human rights, development and poverty reduction, and the environment. Such widening concerns have ensured strong support for the UN, particularly across the developing world.
- The UN faces a range of important challenges and pressures for reform. These include those generated by the changing location of global power in an increasingly multipolar world, those associated with criticisms of the composition and powers of the Security Council, and those related to the UN's finances and organization.

Questions for discussion

- How do international organizations differ from states?
- How are international organization and global governance linked?
- Are international organizations merely mechanisms for pursuing state interests by other means?
- Is a hegemonic power necessary for the creation of international organizations?
- To what extent are international organizations ideational constructs?
- Why has the UN been more successful than the League of Nations?
- Why has the UN only had limited success in establishing a system of collective security?
- How and why has the UN's approach to peacekeeping evolved?
- How effective has the UN been in discharging its economic and social responsibilities?
- Why is it so difficult to reform the Security Council?

Further reading

Armstrong, D., L. Lloyd and J. Redmond *International Organization in World Politics* (2004). An introduction to the history of modern international organization that places a particular emphasis on the development of the UN.

Rittberger, R. and B. Zangl *International Organization: Polity, Politics and Policies* (2006). A systematic theoretical and empirical introduction to the evolution, structure and policies of international organizations.

Thakur, R. *The United Nations, Peace and Security: From Collective Security to the Responsibility to Protect* (2006). An analysis of the UN's role in maintaining peace and security that examines the developing framework for its peacekeeping operations.

Weiss, T. G. *What's Wrong with the United Nations (and How to Fix It)* (2009). A stimulating examination of the UN's alleged ills and of possible cures.

Links to relevant web resources can be found on the *Global Politics* website