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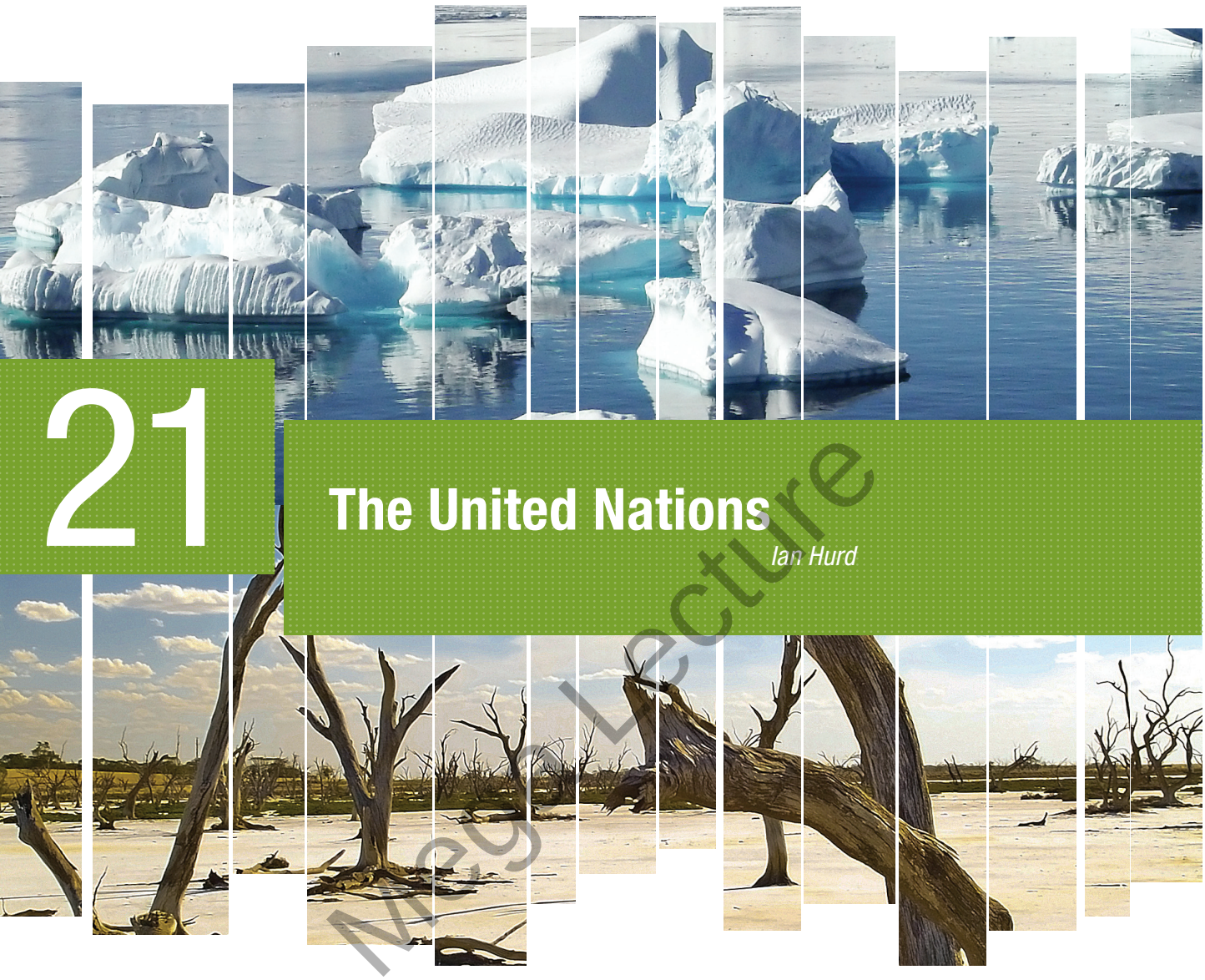

21 The United Nations

Ian Hurd

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Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the legal and political features of the **United Nations (UN)**. The chapter begins with a short introduction to the **UN Charter** in **international law**, which shows the framework, limits and authorities within which all UN activity takes place. It then puts these into a more practical setting, emphasising how the organisation can be seen as at once an actor, as a forum and as a resource (or some combination of all three).

The UN Charter has near-constitutional status in the inter-state system as it performs two crucial functions that make contemporary inter-state relations fundamentally different from any previous era. First, the Charter defines the essential obligations that governments owe to one another, which include a strict regulation on the use of force to settle disputes, the aspirations to universal **human rights** and gender equality, and the subordination of **states** to the collective decisions of the UN Security Council. Second, it creates a set of institutions with formal and specific competencies to oversee those obligations. These institutions, including the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Trusteeship Council, have their own **powers**, limits and practices, and therefore their own legal and political lives. Since its **ratification** in 1945, the Charter has been the centrepiece of international law among states, setting the post-1945 era apart from anything that had come before. The organisation has come to include all **sovereign states** in the world, or at least all states that are widely recognised as being states (where who counts as a 'state' is largely endogenous, that is: it is defined by who the UN will accept as a member), and so its rules and powers have come to make up the constitutional structure for inter-state relations.

The complexity, authority and breadth of the UN mean that its decisions and its peculiarities matter a great deal for world politics. At the same time, an important and intriguing gap exists between the UN's formal powers and its life in practice, which means that it is worth examining both the legal terms set out in the Charter and the interaction between the Charter and the real-world practices that arise around it.

The UN in the Charter

The UN Charter is the international treaty that states sign to become members of the United Nations organisation. It is an inter-*state* treaty and it makes the organisation a strictly **state-centric** entity: in law, it has power over states only and not individuals, firms, or other groups. The Charter was negotiated in 1945 among the fifty or so countries that participated in the San Francisco conference as World War II was ending, and it was conceived as a formal foundation for the new international organisation and also a place to express what were thought of as universal values and goals in need of reinforcement after the traumas of the first half of the twentieth century. It therefore contains two kinds of clauses: those that affirm values and goals in aspirational terms, and those that express formal legal content. The former are exemplified by the Preamble, which says among other things that 'We the Peoples of the United Nations [are] determined … to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors' and pledge to 'employ international machinery for the promotion of the economic and social advancement of all peoples'. The latter are much less poetic (for example, Article 29 says 'The Security Council may establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions') but they set the legal

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framework within which much of international politics takes place. They spell out the commitments that states make to each other and to the organisation as a consequence of joining the UN, and they define the organs of the UN and their various powers and limits. This section explores the three main areas in which membership in the UN creates specific legal constraints or obligations on states.

The main obligations that arise from membership in the UN are these: to pay one's financial contribution to the organisation (Art. 17(2)); to support the decisions of the UN Security Council (Art. 25); and to refrain from using force to settle disputes with other states (Art. 2(4)). These are commitments that are binding on every individual state that is a member of the UN. They constitute only a small proportion of the entire Charter but they have an enormous influence over the content and direction of international relations. Some UN organs (notably the Security Council) can create further obligations, but these remain encapsulated within the core powers from which they derive. For instance, the Security Council decided in 2001 (Resolution 1343) that no country should import rough diamonds from Liberia, on the belief that the revenue of the diamond trade was funding the Liberian leader's support of **war** and atrocity in west Africa, and this automatically became a mandatory obligation for UN members as a result of the language of Article 25 (and further of Chapter VII) of the Charter.

The UN itself is delimited by two very important clauses in Article 2 of the Charter. The first says that 'The Organization is based on the sovereign equality of all its Members' (Art. 2(1)), and the second that 'Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state' (Art. 2.(7)). These create both an internal and an external limit on all of the UN's activities. Internally, Article 2(1) requires that everything that happens in the organisation must treat all members equally. The UN cannot behave in any way that favours one group of members over any others. All members have the same rights and duties under law, no matter how powerful or weak they may be. Externally, Article 2(7) establishes that the UN has no authority over states' domestic affairs, and everything it does in the wider world must either deal with the *international* rather than domestic affairs of states, or be done with the permission of the state with which it is dealing. These are strict and serious limits on the power of the UN – although both are subject to ambiguities in their interpretation which make for some interesting and unexpected developments. For instance, the key to understanding Article 2(7) is understanding the term 'essentially within the domestic jurisdiction' of a state – and this language is not further explained anywhere in the Charter. It is open to interpretation, and is frequently argued over. It is often understood as the obverse of a 'threat to international **peace** and **security**' from Article 39, such that any issue that threatens international peace and security is by definition not within the domestic jurisdiction of the state. Putting these two clauses together means that when the Security Council decides that a matter is a threat to international peace the restrictions on intervention contained in Art. 2(7) are not relevant to the case. So, when the Council decided in 2006 that North Korea's nuclear weapons program constituted a threat to international peace and security (Res. 1718), North Korea could no longer claim that it had the right under international law to develop these weapons for its own defence. Similarly, Sudan cannot maintain that the atrocities in Darfur constitute a matter within its domestic jurisdiction, following the decision of the Council in 2004 (Res. 1564) that identified them as a problem of international peace and security.

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The UN's principal organs

The Charter defines the central institutions (the 'principal organs') of the UN as the General Assembly (GA), the Security Council (SC), the UN Secretariat, the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the Trusteeship Council, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). The last three of these are much less significant than the first three and I treat them briefly here before turning to the GA, the SC and the Secretariat.

BOX 21.1: KEY TEXTS

UN Charter: ECOSOC

Article 61

1. The Economic and Social Council shall consist of fifty-four Members of the United Nations elected by the General Assembly.

Article 62

1. The Economic and Social Council may make or initiate studies and reports with respect to international economic, social, cultural, educational, health, and related matters and may make recommendations … to the General Assembly, to the Members of the United Nations, and to the specialized agencies concerned.
2. It may make recommendations for the purposes of promoting respect for, and observance of, human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

Article 67

1. Each member of the Economic and Social Council shall have one vote.
2. Decisions of the Economic and Social Council shall be made by a majority of the members present and voting.

The ECOSOC (see Box 21.1) is best seen as a subsidiary organ to the General Assembly and so fits into the discussion of the GA below. The ICJ (see Box 21.2) hears cases that arise from legal disputes between states and it issues binding decisions in response. The court is set out in the UN Charter but it is largely governed by the separate Statute of the ICJ and its docket of contentious cases is entirely separate from the UN.

BOX 21.2: KEY TEXTS

UN Charter: the International Court of Justice

Article 92

The International Court of Justice shall be the principal judicial organ of the United Nations.

Article 93

1. All Members of the United Nations are *ipso facto* parties to the Statute of the International Court of Justice.

Article 94

1. Each member of the United Nations undertakes to comply with the decision of the International Court of Justice to which it is a party.

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The Trusteeship Council (see Box 21.3) was once the legal overseer of territories governed by other states as mandates or in trusteeship, and it was responsible for ensuring that this near-colonial relationship did not degenerate into outright **colonialism**. The system came to an end when Palau, the last of the trust territories, declared independence and was recognised as a sovereign state in 1994. The Trusteeship Council is therefore dead in practice, though it remains alive in law given that its permanence is written into the Charter; it still has members, still chooses its president and vice-president, and until 2005 it still held annual meetings that were without content.

BOX 21.3: KEY TEXTS

UN Charter: the Trusteeship Council

Article 75

The United Nations shall establish … an international trusteeship system for the administration and supervision of such territories as may be placed thereunder by subsequent agreements.

Article 77

1. The trusteeship system shall apply to …
   a. territories now held under mandate;
   b. territories which may be detached from enemy states as a result of the Second World War; and
   c. territories voluntarily placed under the system by states responsible for their administration.

Article 87

The General Assembly and, under its authority, the Trusteeship Council, … may:

a. consider reports submitted by the administering authority; …
b. provide for periodic visits to the respective trust territories …; and
c. take these and other actions in conformity with the terms of the trusteeship agreements.

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The core of the UN's mission is performed by the the Security Council, General Assembly and the Secretariat. The division of authority among them establishes that the Council has the authority to take decisions regarding international peace and security on behalf of all UN members (Box 21.4), the General Assembly may make recommendations to members on any topic within the scope of the Charter (Box 21.6), and the Secretariat supplies the administrative support to make these two function (Box 21.7).

This distribution of powers reflects the interests of the **great powers** in 1945: the US, the USSR, and the UK wanted a centralised enforcement vehicle that would represent the entire UN membership and a forum for global debate that could encompass the broad range of that membership. These two functions had to be institutionally separate because they reflected contradictory impulses of domination and legitimation. The great powers (see Chapter 19) wanted to ensure that the enforcement function could not operate outside of their control, and thus the Security Council's broad power to intervene in world politics is set inside an institution of very limited membership (fifteen states, after the reforms of 1965) in which each of the five permanent (P5) members has a veto (Art. 27(3)) (see Box 21.5).

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The General Assembly was intended as a deliberative body with universal membership, space for open-ended discussion and a majoritarian-decision rule. It operates by majority rule (two-thirds majority for 'important' matters: Art. 18(2)) and without a veto, and the consequence of this relatively **democratic** structure was that the great powers in 1945 restricted its powers to making recommendations to states or international organisations (Arts 10, 13). There is an intentionally inverse relationship between democratic structure and decision-making authority. the Council stands in an authoritative position over states with respect to matters of international peace and security, and the framers of the Charter in 1945 were not willing to allow this power to leave the hands of the great powers. The General Assembly functions as the meeting place for the international community of states, and its diversity and pluralism were thought safe only in a body that was limited to making recommendations.

BOX 21.4: KEY TEXTS

UN Charter: the Security Council

Article 23

1. The Security Council shall consist of fifteen Members of the United Nations. The Republic of China, France, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the United Kingdom … and the United States of America shall be permanent members of the Security Council. The General Assembly shall elect ten other Members.

Article 24

1. In order to ensure prompt and effective action by the United Nations, its Members confer on the Security Council primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security.

Article 27

1. Each member of the Security Council shall have one vote …
2. Decisions of the Security Council … shall be made by an affirmative vote of nine members including the concurring votes of the permanent members.

Article 39

The Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression and shall … decide what measures shall be taken … to restore international peace and security.

The Security Council is granted 'primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security' (Art. 24(1)), and to that end states are required to: cede their own right to use force to settle disputes (Art. 2(4)); respect the decisions about peace and security the Council makes on their behalf (Arts 24, 25, 39, 42); and commit some of their military forces to the collective (Art. 43). The logic behind the Council is something like what Hobbes had in mind in *Leviathan* ([1651] 1968) to solve the problem of the state of nature: individuals must disarm and the central authority must monopolise the use of force. The Security Council has been given a legal monopoly over war-making, which it can activate by following the two-part procedure set out in Chapter VII of the Charter: first, the Council must determine that there exists a breach of

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or threat to international peace and security (Art. 39); second, it must decide to call on the collective military forces of its members and deploy them to remedy the breach or threat (Art. 42). These resources are loaned to the UN by states for the specific operation in question; the Council controls no military forces of its own, despite the intention of Article 43 that states should set aside for the Council some of their militaries.

The two-stage process is illustrated by the reaction to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990. By Resolution 660 (2 August 1990) the Security Council identified 'a breach of international peace and security as regards the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait' and in Resolution 678 (29 November 1990) it authorised 'Member States co-operating with the Government of Kuwait … to use all necessary means to uphold and implement resolution 660'.

The Iraq war stands as a singular example of the UN's centralised system of international enforcement in practice. It may also be *the* singular example, since no other UN operation under Chapter VII has been as legally coherent and uncontroversial, and many military adventures by states have been launched in the face of the Charter's prohibitions. International history since 1945 is littered with wars, threats and violations of international peace, and yet the Council has used its authority to intervene only very conservatively. The practical political questions of when to intervene, against whom, for what goals, with what precedential effect and at whose expense have almost always prevented the Council from activating its full military potential. A very small number of peace-enforcement operations have been launched by the Council, notably in Kuwait in 1990–91 and in Korea in 1950. Most of the Council's activity has involved pressuring states to change their policies while holding the threat of UN intervention in the background.

BOX 21.5: KEY ACTORS

The P5: permanent members of the UN Security Council

- China
- France
- Russia
- UK
- USA

The General Assembly's authority is wider in scope but less binding than that of the Council. Its powers are set out in Articles 10 through 13. As a general matter, the Assembly 'may discuss any questions or any matters within the scope of the present Charter' (Art. 10). The Assembly is the plenary body of the UN, meaning that it includes as members all of the **nation**-states in the UN. Each state gets one vote in the Assembly, and decisions require supporting votes of two-thirds of the members present and voting. While Article 10 authorises the Assembly to discuss 'any questions or any matters' of concern to the UN, the Assembly's power over those topics is limited to making 'recommendations' to states or to the Secretary-General, issuing reports and launching studies (see Box 21.6). General Assembly resolutions are therefore not legally binding. States' obligations to these recommendations are very limited: the Charter implies that members have a duty to take these recommendations seriously, but it does not create any formal legal obligation to implement or even consider them, let alone to force states to do anything. The General Assembly's power is therefore broad but very shallow.

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It can consider and make recommendations on many topics but its outputs have no coercive authority.

The one exception to this pattern is the Assembly's decisive power over the UN expenditure budget and the allocation of costs among member states. This authority is established by Article 17, and it is noteworthy because it means that the sensitive matters of revenue and spending are decided by the Assembly by two-thirds majority vote, without any special influence reserved for the highest-contributing states. The UN's critics, particularly conservatives in the US, have taken this as evidence that UN spending is disconnected from or unaccountable to the rich states who contribute the largest shares of the UN's income (see, for instance, B.D. Schaefer 2006). This is not correct. That the UN is organised this way reflects the fact that in 1945 there was a dominant view that the spending decisions of the organisation were of interest to the general membership and not just to the great powers. In this case, the democratic impulse trumped the usual tendency for the strong states to keep close control over important decisions. However, the power of the big contributors is accommodated in more subtle ways: the draft budget only reaches the Assembly after having passed through a committee that contains the major contributors and that operates by consensus. This committee (the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions (ACABQ)) has sixteen members, elected from the General Assembly, and it receives the draft budget from the Secretary-General before sending it on to the Assembly. By customary agreement, the US always has a member on the committee. In practice, therefore, the US can veto the budget in its drafting stage – no budget can reach the Assembly without US approval. In a second accommodation to the influence of political power, the budget for **peacekeeping** missions is organised separately from the 'regular' budget described in Article 17, in an effort to insulate the regular budget from the disagreements that arose when the GA, rather than the SC, launched peace operations in the 1950s and 1960s.

BOX 21.6: KEY TEXTS

UN Charter: the General Assembly

Article 9

1. The General Assembly shall consist of all the Members of the United Nations.

Article 10

The General Assembly may discuss any questions or matters within the scope of the present Charter … [and] make recommendations to the Members … on any such questions or matters.

Article 18

1. Each member of the General Assembly shall have one vote.
2. Decisions of the General Assembly on important questions shall be made by a two-thirds majority of the members present and voting.

The constitutional arrangement of the Assembly means that it is the closest thing that currently exists to a comprehensive deliberative body of states. It may sometimes look like a global legislature but it lacks the crucial ingredient of the capacity to pass legislation. Decisions of the Assembly come in the form of resolutions, and these

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are defined in the Charter as recommendations rather than decisions. Nevertheless, the Assembly's deliberations and resolutions can, when the political forces align in their favour, take on political weight that is greater than their legal authority. They can sometimes be successfully presented as reflecting the view of the 'international community' of states. Several of the most famous GA resolutions illustrate the fact that their political impact sometimes far outweighs their very limited legal status. For instance, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights began its life as a declaration (not a resolution) by the General Assembly in 1948. This declaration is an excellent example of how the Assembly can be used to reinforce **norms** or rules of customary international law. Similarly, the GA Resolution known colloquially as 'Uniting for Peace' (GA 377) is influential, though far more legally uncertain. It includes the claim that the Assembly can use its recommendatory power to create new peace operations in cases when the Security Council fails to execute its 'primary' responsibility for peace and security under Article 24. In 1975, the Assembly passed a resolution (A/3379) declaring that 'Zionism is a form of racism because it privileges one religious or ethnic group over all others'. This was revoked in 1991 by Resolution 46/86, but the controversy it attracted shows the political power of GA instruments beyond their purely legal authority.

The UN as actor, forum and resource

The UN on paper can be very different from the UN in practice. While the rules and institutions described in the Charter set formal boundaries around its behaviour, much of what makes the organisation interesting and important arises as states and others strive to operate in and around those boundaries. The assorted complexities of the UN's structure and practice mean that it displays itself in different ways to different observers and in different contexts. At times, the UN behaves like an independent actor in world politics, making its influence felt on states and others and taking action in the world. At other times, it operates like a forum where states and others come to discuss among themselves, with the UN providing an institutional setting where negotiations can take place. At still other times, the UN is a resource in the hands of other players, acting as an instrument or tool by which these others hope to advance their goals. The three functions of actor, forum and resource must be combined by scholars in order to get a more complete picture of the power and nature of the UN (I. Hurd 2011).

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The UN as an actor

International organisations such as the UN are actors in world politics. They are constituted by international law as independent entities, separate from the states that are their founders and their members. The practical expression of this independence varies greatly across organisations, but in a formal sense they are corporate 'persons', much like firms are 'persons' in domestic commercial law. At a minimum, this means that they have legal standing, with certain rights and obligations. These qualities were explicitly recognised for the UN in the ICJ opinion on *Reparations for Injuries suffered in the Service of the United Nations* in 1949, but that case merely affirmed what had existed in prior custom and practice: inter-state organisations are legally independent from their founders. Beyond this legal minimum, being recognised as an actor requires some kind of social recognition, plus some kind of capacity for action. For the UN, these are evident in the ways that states treat the UN as a player of consequence in

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world politics – states appear to believe that it matters what the UN does and says. They feel the need to respond to unfavourable reports by the organisation, to influence the direction of UN action and to gain membership on important committees. These behaviours indicate that the UN has a conceptual status separate from its member states, with the potential to hinder or advance their interests.

The UN as a forum

International organisations are also places in space and time. They are buildings, conferences, schedules of meetings and lists of members. Part of their utility is that they facilitate discussions among states, reducing their transaction costs and changing their political symbolism. The UN may have no role in these discussions other than providing a physical and political focal point; but this can be an important contribution, and very different to the 'UN-as-actor' function.

In its role as forum, the UN represents an extension of the nineteenth-century European practice of holding *ad hoc* themed conferences among governments, such as those that produced the first **Geneva Convention**. This practice became largely institutionalised in the UN after 1945, with major UN-sponsored conferences on environment and development (Rio 1993), human rights (Vienna 1994), and the status of women (Mexico City 1975, Beijing 1995) among others. The value of the UN in these cases is that it can provide experienced logistical support for such large meetings, even though it itself may not be present as a formal participant. They represent the 'forum' function of international organisations in its clearest form. Most international organisations include a plenary body in which all members are represented, and whose purpose is general deliberation about the work or themes of the organisation. The General Assembly is perhaps the best example of an international organisation in the shape of a forum. But beyond the UN, most organisations include a similar component: the International Criminal Court (ICC) has an Assembly of States Parties; the **World Trade Organization (WTO)** has its General Council; the International Labor Organization (ILO) has the International Labor Conference. The procedures for discussion in these bodies are relatively inclusive and open so that all members have the opportunity to participate. As a consequence, they tend to have either few executive powers or high standards of consensus for decisions. The UN General Assembly fits the former category: it can make recommendations but has few powers to take legally binding decisions. The WTO fits the latter: its Dispute Settlement Board can take important decisions such as overturning dispute settlement panel decisions, but only when all members agree (or at least when none is willing formally to oppose the decision).

The deliberative functions of these assemblies can have a powerful legitimating effect on the organisation and its decisions. They are also useful for facilitating side-negotiations among members. For instance, the original motivation behind the UN General Assembly was to have a place where states that were not great powers could express their views regarding the work of the organisation (Bosco 2009), but its annual meetings in New York have come to include both the formal speeches by governments and the large and unknowable number of informal meetings on the sides that are made possible by virtue of so many diplomats and leaders being in one city at the same time. The transaction costs for **diplomacy** are thereby reduced, and a benefit is achieved even if the formal speeches do not solve any particular problem.

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BOX 21.7: KEY TEXTS

UN Charter: the Secretariat

Article 97

The Secretariat shall comprise a Secretary-General and such staff as the Organization may require. The Secretary-General shall be appointed by the General Assembly upon the recommendation of the Security Council. He [or she] shall be the chief administrative officer of the Organization.

Article 99

The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his [or her] opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.

Article 100

1. In the performance of their duties the Secretary-General and the staff shall not receive instructions from any government or from any other authority external to the Organization. They shall refrain from any action which might reflect on their position as international officials responsible only to the Organization.

and law: it claims that everything that is done through or by the UN can be reduced analytically to the behaviour of individual states without losing any meaning. It denies the possibility of corporate personhood for international organisations, and thus also the possibility that they might have positions or take actions independent of their members. This is an impossible position to sustain, since it requires that we deny that there is any difference between states acting alone and states acting through the UN. The real-world of international relations is full of examples that states react quite differently to what other states do as opposed to what international organisations do. Consider the US effort to gain Security Council approval for its invasion of Iraq in 2003, while John Bolton was in the US Department of State: the premise of that effort was that the Council could provide collective legitimation for the invasion and this would change how other states reacted to it. The US strategy of seeking Security Council support presumed that the audience of states would see a UN-supported invasion as more legitimate than one without Council approval, or than if the US gained the state-by-state support of governments individually through **bilateral** efforts. If there is a difference in how the action is perceived depending on whether it is supported by a collection of individual states and supported by those states through the Council, then the reductionist view must be wrong. That difference represents the independent contribution of the Security Council to world politics, beyond its role as a forum or meeting place.

It is equally hard to sustain an entirely actor-centric view of the UN, or of most international organisations. The independence of even the strongest international organisation is always conditional on an alignment of social forces that is outside of its control. The Security Council, for instance, has the authority to intervene in world politics in any way it sees fit in response to anything it identifies as a threat to international peace and security. And yet its ability to take action on international security depends on the voluntary contributions of military resources by individual member states. As a

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result, the actor-like qualities in the international system that are legally enshrined by the Charter are drastically undercut in practice by member states. Both the independence of international organisations and their limits are central to some versions of the 'delegation' approach, which suggests that international organisations can be understood based on the act of delegation by which states endow them with authority (Hawkins et al. 2006). Once empowered by this delegated authority, the organisation may have considerable autonomy to deploy its powers as it wishes, and it may be a challenge for member states to control it. To overstate the independence of international organisations is as much a mistake as to understate it, and anywhere along this spectrum all claims about the autonomy of international organisations must be grounded in an empirical study of the organisation in question. There are no general answers to questions about the distribution of power and authority between states and international organisations. The challenge for the scholar is to figure out how to combine them and where to put the emphasis to best suit the research problem at hand. Michael Barnett (2003) provides a good model in his book on how the UN came to abandon Rwanda at the time of the genocide in 1994: he examines the positions that the strongest states on the Security Council brought to the question (a 'forum' view of the UN); he also looks at the position of the Secretary-General and his staff (thus recognising that the UN was also an actor in the process); and how the collective decisions of the Council would be perceived and manipulated by other states and by the *genocidaires* themselves (i.e. how the UN would be used as a tool by other players).

Conclusion

As actor, forum and resource, the UN is the world's most comprehensive international organisation in terms of both its membership and its scope of authority. It encompasses all countries and potentially all policy areas that carry international implications. Its salience in international politics is remarkable given that most of its organs do not have the legal authority to take decisions that are binding on its members. The General Assembly and ECOSOC are explicitly limited to making recommendations rather than taking decisions, and the Secretariat has no authority at all over member-states. The few exceptions to this pattern are interesting precisely because they stand out so clearly from the norm, and because they subvert the conventional wisdom that international organisations are legally subordinate to their members. The binding powers in the UN include the General Assembly's power over the budget and the Security Council's authority to enact military interventions. The most controversial moments in the life of the UN arise when its powers come up against the interests of strong players, and in the resulting contests of legal and political strength we see the power (and limits) of the UN most clearly. However, much of the UN's contribution to the world takes place in a quieter register, in moments where its resources and its subtle political influence are put to use in the pursuit of the goals of the Preamble. These are less visible than the episodes of high tension, but they likely contribute more towards realising the collective values of the UN than is accomplished during the news-making crises.

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