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**The United Nations System:
Prospects for Institutional Renewal**

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ABSTRACT

This paper assesses the institutional constraints on the effectiveness of the United Nations over the course of its existence, especially in relation to its central mission to promote international peace and security. Only passing attention is accorded to the Bretton Woods institutions. The paper considers these constraints both in relation to the global setting during the cold war, and in the decade since the fall of the Berlin Wall. It also suggests the limitations that derive from the state-centric orientations of most governmental élites, especially those associated with leading states.

At the same time, the paper discusses the achievements of the United Nations, some of which were not anticipated at the time of its inception. The degree to which the Organization has achieved and retained virtually universal membership despite the many sharp tensions among its members is itself an impressive confirmation of the worth, and possibly the necessity, of the UN. It also contrasts with the inability of its predecessor, the League of Nations, to obtain a similar level of participation.

The paper concludes with a consideration of reforms in process and institutional arrangement that would make the UN more effective in meeting the main world order challenges of the twenty-first century. At the moment, the prospects for realizing such reforms are not promising, but the pressures of world events could change this outlook rather quickly and unexpectedly.

1. INTRODUCTION

The undertaking of this paper is to consider the record of the United Nations system since its inception, with an eye focused on prospects for renewal and reform at the present time. The main criteria relied upon for assessment are considerations of effectiveness and legitimacy in relation to the operations of the United Nations.

The paper begins with a discussion of why the present global setting is resistant to renewal and reform, but with the qualification that such a climate of resistance could change rapidly. And that over time, the sheer complexity of international life and the salience of global scale problems is likely to exert pressures to strengthen the United Nations.

From matters of context, the paper moves on to discuss the historical origins of the United Nations, and the extent to which the experiences with global security prior to 1945 shaped the character of the UN in relation to the all-important peace and security agenda. This look backwards is then followed by an analysis of the evolution of the Organization, especially in relation to the two most influential contextual factors, namely, the decolonization process and the cold war. In these regards, the United Nations system as a whole has over the years emerged as a site of struggle in relation to both the East-West conflict, largely superseded since 1989, and the still persisting North-South encounter. The paper also considers the creative role played by the United Nations with respect to arranging conferences on global challenges on a range of issues including environment, women, population, and human rights. These conferences were not only important substantively, but they gave considerable access to transnational social forces as represented by non-governmental organizations.

The paper concludes with sections devoted to prospects for enhancing UN effectiveness and legitimacy. In this regard, emphasis is placed on geopolitical factors as creating the most difficult obstacle to reform. Also, several concrete proposals for reform are sketched to provide examples of practical, non-utopian steps that would both strengthen the UN and serve the cause of human well-being. At the same time, to underscore the dysfunction of geopolitical influences, it is made clear that the short-term prospects for achieving needed and desirable reforms are rather grim. It would seem that the UN will not be fundamentally reformable until the

movement for global democracy gains far greater leverage than it presently possesses.

2. POINTS OF DEPARTURE

It needs to be acknowledged at the outset, for reasons to be explained later, that the global setting is not currently favourable to moves designed to strengthen most key activities of the United Nations system. Such an assessment is sharply at odds with the case for new roles and functions based on the changing world order agenda. It also reflects the missed opportunities of the historical situation to promote peace, justice, development, democracy, and sustainability provided by the ending of the cold war and the associated muting of strategic conflict among leading states. Such opportunities were also provided by the mood after the Gulf War in 1991 and again in 1995 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. Somehow these moments of seeming opportunity for major UN reform and evolution came and went without a single notable achievement.

This pessimistic mood, as well, expresses the institutional frustration arising from the apparent inability in this period for UN members to reach any agreement on a formula for an expansion of the permanent membership of the Security Council. It is generally accepted by all shades of opinion that some Security Council expansion would be important, at least, to take account of the fundamental changes in the composition of international society since 1945, especially the far greater role being played by non-Western countries. The failure to make progress on this symbolic issue has tinged with doubt the whole project of UN reform.

But there are some additional factors that have also had a negative impact. The failure of the United States to meet its financial obligations in recent years has acted as a depressant throughout the UN system. Because the US shoulders the biggest financial burden, being responsible as of now for 25 per cent of the budget, its non-payment produces considerable pressure throughout the UN system and puts the bureaucracy constantly on a crisis footing that distracts energies from its substantive duties. Furthermore, the recent American theme song of 'downsizing', while justified with respect to aspects of the UN, generally works against efforts to strengthen the organization.

Even more to the point, the UN is judged by the public mainly in relation to peace and security issues, and although the criteria for assessment vary in different parts of the world, there is a general sense that the UN has not fared well in the 1990s. The UN performance in Bosnia and Rwanda were widely perceived as dismal failures, associated with inept and insufficient responses in the setting of genocidal behaviour. In light of these experiences, bypassing of the UN Charter requirements of Security Council authorization in the launch of the NATO War over Kosovo in early 1999, reinforced the impression that the UN peace and security role was being eclipsed in dangerous ways that left the way open for unregulated geopolitical initiatives.

It should be appreciated that the UN does not deserve most of the blame for these developments. It was expected to address complex humanitarian emergencies without the necessary resources and guidelines to ensure successful outcomes. The membership of the Security Council often lacked a sufficient political will to generate effective action in response to the challenges of the last decade, and irresponsibly designated the UN to take action. It needs to be remembered that the UN is essentially 'a club of sovereign states', with the Permanent Members of the Security Council being given a privileged status. As such, especially in the area of peace-keeping, it is an extension of the state system rather than an alternative to it. It also needs to be appreciated that aside from the Gulf War, the challenges directed at the UN derived from catastrophic circumstances *internal* to sovereign states. The status of these challenges was somewhat questionable constitutionally and logistically, given the understanding that the defining mandate of the UN was deliberately confined to *international* conflict situations.[1] In fact, the last three secretary-generals of the Organization have in various ways argued that the evolution of international human rights norms has eroded the domestic jurisdiction limitation. These leaders insisted that the UN was now available in the event of humanitarian catastrophes even if situated entirely within a state.

It would be a great mistake to confuse this present conjuncture of disappointments and setbacks with a more durable assessment of the prospects of the Organization for reform and adaptation. The climate of relevant opinion can change rapidly. The complexity of international life, combined with the reluctance of leading states to act where their national interests are not at risk, will create many occasions when the UN provides the only arena within which an acceptable pattern of response can be fashioned. Despite the disillusionment with the peace-keeping efforts of the

1990s, the major states continue to turn to the UN. This was again evident late in 1999. Emergency arrangements for East Timor and Sierra Leone were fashioned, although belatedly in view of the human carnage, as responses to humanitarian catastrophes that had been experienced by each of these countries.

Also, it is a serious error, although commonly made, to reduce the actuality of the United Nations to its efforts in the realm of peace and security. True, this is the litmus test relied upon by the media and the public, particularly in the North, to assess whether the UN is working or not. A more adequate assessment would also consider the relevance of the UN to a spectrum of issues, including development, human rights, environment, health, labour, and global economic policy. Arguably, for most of the peoples in the world, who are located in the South, the role of the UN outside the area of peace and security is what makes the Organization affect their lives and improve life circumstances, as when UNICEF or UNDP are active and visible on the local scene. In contrast, for the countries of the North, their awareness of the UN role is largely confined to media reports relating to the peace and security agenda.

Overall, the UN has proved to be resilient. The complexity of international society, as well as multiple forms of interdependence, has established the Organization as indispensable for the practical implementation of many aspects of the global policy agenda. As well, the range of activities that proceed in the specialized agencies of the UN perform a myriad of useful, even indispensable, information-gathering and lawmaking functions.[2]

Furthermore, it is quite likely that the currently obstructive approach of the United States will swing back in more internationalist and positive directions in the years ahead. Such a policy shift in Washington would alter the overall climate of opinion, being far more appreciative of the contributions of the UN and supportive of needed reforms, including selective support for institutional expansion to take better account of various global developments. The present phase of American foreign policy, characterized by President Clinton as newly 'isolationist', reflects a temporary conservative turn toward domestic politics, which may well be soon replaced by a new phase of internationalist engagement. Such an American readjustment would likely have many favourable ramifications for the future role of the UN system.

It is also important not to take due account of some long-term trends that have been evident in the course of the UN experience that now stretches

over more than five decades. The UN survived the fissures of both the cold war and the turbulent dynamics of decolonization without producing any significant withdrawal from participation. Such a record is in contrast to the experience of the League of Nations. Several important countries never participated and others withdrew in disgust. The UN has achieved near universality of membership that now extends to about 99 per cent of the people living on the planet. Its solid footing in world politics is almost beyond question at this point.

Despite ups and downs in perception and performance, the UN is here to stay. The increasingly global scope and complexity of policy issues, as well as the diminished territoriality of economic relationships, suggest a potentiality for expanding governance roles for the UN. At the same time, difficulties, as noted, are apparent. At their core is a concern as to whether the richer, more powerful, countries of the North will be wise and generous enough to allow the UN to act on behalf of all the peoples of the world in a manner that is both effective and legitimate. At issue, is the extent of willingness to endow the UN with the capabilities to uphold the global public goods of the planet as a whole, and to serve as an agent for the promotion of human development.[3]

3.   THE ORIGINAL DESIGN

The mixture of global circumstances and short-term historical memory conditioned the original conception of the United Nations. In 1945 World War II had ended and the Atlantic Alliance of victorious powers was intent on preserving the peace in the world ahead. The United Nations was formed predominantly to avoid the recurrence of major war, but there was a tension at the outset between sceptics and true believers. The sceptics doubted that the wartime alliance would hold or that collective security would work. They were convinced that only countervailing power organized to deter potential adversaries could increase the chances for the avoidance of major warfare in the future. The so-called 'lessons of Munich' were uppermost in their minds, that appeasement and disarmament do not bring peace, but on the contrary, nurture an appetite for aggression.

The true believers in the UN idea take a longer view of history. They thought that any reversion to balance of power geopolitics would culminate in World War III, which would be catastrophic in the nuclear age. For them

the only path to peace and stability was by way of a strong United Nations. They hoped that the UN would gradually induce the leading sovereign states to disarm by stages, building up in the process an independent enforcement capability within the United Nations, and producing over time a world order premised on respect for the Rule of Law. Such a maximalist view of the United Nations rested on the belief that the peaceful evolution of international society depended on establishing some form of limited world government that would eliminate war as a social institution.[4]

The war/peace preoccupation surrounding the establishment of the United Nations needs to be understood in relation to several additional formative factors. To begin with, the Westphalian idea of a world of sovereign, territorially based, states as the sole significant political actor on the global stage was so widely accepted as to be presupposed. At the same time, there was an appreciation, especially by the victorious powers in World War II, that the prospects for collective security depended on sustaining their wartime alliance against the defeated Axis powers. It was this geopolitical argument that was translated into a constitutional arrangement by establishing a Security Council with five permanent members, each given a veto power over substantive decisions. Here was the central gamble with respect to the UN role on the essential goal of keeping world peace: if the P-5 could agree, there was no further obstacle to creating within the framework of the UN an effective response, and the institutional skeleton for doing so was set forth in Chapter VII of the Charter; contrariwise, in the face of disagreement between the five permanent members, the Organization encoded its inability to act at all in response to a world crisis, however serious.

This submission to geopolitical realism has persisted throughout the entire lifetime of the United Nations. It raises two sorts of questions: first, are the geopolitical premises of 1945 still valid in 2000? If not, should there be changes made in the character of permanent membership to reflect shifts in power relations? So far, to the extent that shifts have been seriously contemplated at all by leading members, they have been in the direction of expanding the P-5 to P-7 or even P-11, but not of substituting, say, India for Britain or Japan for France. Nor have serious proposals been made to consider 'Europe' as a consolidated representative that would break the statist monopoly over formal participation and membership, or, more radically, to create a permanent rotating seat for economically disadvantaged states or for a roster of the ten governments with the best human rights records.

The second more fundamental question, is the whole idea of conditioning UN response on a geopolitical consensus. Such a notion takes account of the concentration of military power and diplomatic leverage in the hands of several predominant states. By so doing, it contradicts the premise of a law-governed world community, and tends to invite selective enforcement of the UN Charter. This raises serious questions about *legitimacy* as well as *effectiveness*, issues that have dogged the Organization since its inception.

Moving in a quite opposite direction was the lower profile agenda of the United Nations as reflected in the wider ambit of the UN system. It was recognized that the *complexity* and *interrelatedness* of international life meant that the Organization needed to coordinate policy and dissemination information across a broad range of specialized concerns: food, children, culture, labour, health, communications, monetary stability, and developmental finance. This set of functional undertakings has been in the form of a large number of specialized agencies and programmes that together comprise the UN system. Their activities have been almost always backgrounded in relation to the overall work of the United Nations, and are knowledgeably perceived by only a handful of specialists. On occasion, in the face of a political encounter, this or that specialized agency or substantive programme becomes controversial. The role of the IMF/World Bank is difficult to categorize in these respects. These Bretton Woods agencies are technically part of the UN functional landscape, but operationally and psychologically they operate autonomously, outside the UN system, with influence concentrated in a few governments representing the world's richest states.

Leaving aside the Bretton Woods dimension, it is widely agreed that these functional activities of the UN have contributed greatly, although unevenly, to the governance of human affairs over the course of the last century. Over the years, as the global agenda shifts and policy priorities change, innovations have been made, adding and adapting programmes, commissions, and institutional arenas. Especially prominent have been a variety of important initiatives associated with the developmental priorities of the countries of the South, as well as the establishment of UNEP in recognition of a global environmental dimension and the steady expansion of human rights activities in response to rising interest and support for a global approach to their implementation. Within these functional settings of the United Nations system much more of a spirit of technical cooperation prevails. There is far less allowance made for a privileged status for leading states, partly because fundamental questions of sovereign rights and

ideological identity are not often at stake. At the same time, especially when East/West and North/South tensions became acute, these agencies and activities could come under sharp attack from one or another perspective because their functional objectivity was allegedly being subordinated to partisan concerns. For instance, the United States withdrew from UNESCO almost 20 years ago, and remains unrepresented.

As a preliminary assessment, it can be concluded that the central UN mission to provide peace and security for countries confronting aggression, has had a generally disappointing history. The geopolitical consensus that existed in 1945 was soon replaced by the gridlock of the cold war. When the UN was able to act at all, it was either a matter of fortuitous circumstance (as in the Korean War) or exceptional geopolitical conditions of superpower convergence (as in the Suez Campaign of 1956). Otherwise, the UN role was either to provide a kind of geopolitical cover (as in the Gulf War) or to act in a neutral peace-keeping role based on consent of adversary parties (the essential innovation of Dag Hammarskjöld). In neither setting, did the UN demonstrate the political will or capability to protect potential and actual victims of aggression, and in this central respect did not overcome the self-help character of global security based on the military might of particular states as augmented by alliance relationships.

The UN peace and security role should then be understood, as *facilitative* of traditional diplomacy, but in no way *superseding* a statist form of world order. As such, the promise of the Charter has not been fulfilled in practice, and the decade since the end of the cold war confirms that the resistance to collective security is deeper than had been widely supposed, namely, as merely a reflection of strategic conflict and ideological antagonism. Unlike in relation to world trade arrangements, or in the setting of European regionalism, the member states of the United Nations have not been prepared to transfer sovereign authority and capabilities to the Security Council with respect to matters of peace and security. Leading states, the geopolitical actors, obviously prefer to rely upon traditional methods of unilateral action or by way of a coalition of the like-minded. The UN Security Council has been invoked on occasion to legitimize or even to disguise recourse to war in the event that a consensus exists among the P-5, as occurred to some extent during the Gulf Crisis of 1990-91. But if such legitimation is not forthcoming or might be seen as an impediment to effective action, then the UN is evaded as occurred during superpower actions in the cold war (e.g. Vietnam, Afghanistan) or subsequently, as in

the war waged by NATO early in 1999 against former Yugoslavia in relation to the fate of Kosovo.

With respect to the functional side of UN activities, the overall picture is much more favourable. The UN has fulfilled, or in some cases exceeded, what seemed to be expectations in 1945. The budgets of specialized agencies and commissions have risen over the years, and the work being done has been generally respected and useful, although some of it has been controversial. The functional dimension of the UN system has demonstrated an impressive capacity to provide niches for new undertakings within the existing framework (as with providing a forum for indigenous peoples) or to establish entirely new institutional arenas (as with UNEP and UNDP). Of course, there are complicating features that qualify enthusiasm for the functional work of the UN. Some agencies declined in prestige due to changes in the social structure, such as the ILO. Others became embroiled in one way or another, often arbitrarily, in a variety of reformist or backlash reactions associated with dogmatic neoliberalism, as was the case with respect to UNESCO and to some extent the ILO. More could certainly have been usefully done by the UN in relation to this functional agenda, but overall the functional side of the UN system seems to be well-established on a basis that does not disappoint UN supporters or greatly antagonize UN critics. Such a generalization needs to be qualified to take account of the general downsizing mandate of the last several years of budgetary austerity, which itself may reflect some wider tendencies associated with downward pressures on expenditures on public goods, particularly on global public goods.[5] This latter development seems connected with the drift in all areas of finance in the direction of privatization, a reflection of the view that market discipline is more efficient than bureaucratic management of a public sector character.

4. THE RELEVANCE OF THE GLOBAL SETTING

The history of the UN is very much entwined with two fissures in international society that has preoccupied the political imagination for more than fifty years. The first of these fissures was the East/West divide that spiralled out of the unresolved aftermath of World War II. It assumed the character of a war-threatening rivalry that affected all regions of the world and made plausible the possibility of an apocalyptic world war fought with nuclear weaponry. The second fissure was the North/South divide that

came to the fore as a sequel to decolonization. These two conflict configurations were overlapped at many points, including the efforts of both superpowers to find as many ideological friends as possible among the newly independent countries in the South. These efforts gave governments leverage to obtain foreign economic assistance. But the superpower rivalry also produced ghastly competitive interventions that resulted in prolonged warfare, especially in relation to divided countries such as Vietnam and Korea, but also in borderland areas such as Afghanistan.

The United Nations was one arena in which these two defining struggles were waged, but in differing modes, with confusing and variable effects. The East/West rivalry was most evident in its tendency to paralyse the Security Council in relation to issues of peace and security. At times, this stalemate was broken. At the start of the Korean War in 1950, the Soviet Union was boycotting the Security Council. With an irony that became evident only after the Sino/Soviet break years later, Moscow was absent to protest the refusal of the Security Council to acknowledge the outcome of the Chinese Revolution by allowing the most populous country to be represented by Beijing. As a result of the Soviet absence, the UN Security Council was not paralysed by the veto, and was able to authorize an American-led UN response to the North Korean invasion of South Korea. The Soviet Union never again made such an institutional mistake, and was thus able to block subsequent Security Council action with which it disagreed.

On a few other occasions, the superpowers were in agreement, usually for differing reasons. In 1956 they both opposed in the Security Council the attack on Egypt by the combined military forces of Israel, France, and Britain, and successfully induced these countries to withdraw from occupied Egyptian territory. There was also a much contested effort to cooperate in the newly independent Belgian Congo (later Zaire) in 1960 to prevent civil war and secession, but the end result was to bring the East/West struggle to the fore with contradictory views about what should have been the UN mission. And again in the early 1980s, both superpowers encouraged a non-response by the Security Council to Iraq's invasion of Iran because both welcomed the efforts to weaken, if not destroy, the Islamic Republic that Iran had become since the Shah's overthrow in 1979. Finally, during the Gorbachev period of leadership, the Soviet Union adopted a cooperative attitude that enabled the UN to play an important facilitative diplomatic role in bringing to an end violent regional conflicts in the Iran/Iraq War, Afghanistan, El Salvador, Angola, and elsewhere.

What seems clear is that the East/West conflict pervaded all aspects of UN activity during the cold war years. It was particularly evident whenever global security issues were raised, and in relation to the activities of the Security Council. The ideologically grounded gridlock was widely accepted as the explanation for the relative ineffectiveness of the United Nations with respect to peace and security questions. In actuality, the cold war tensions affected all aspects of the work of the UN, requiring compromises to be reached so as to permit activity of any sort. From the outset, the Soviet side adopted a defensive posture, recognizing that it was outnumbered if issues were resolved on a straight majority basis. At one point in the 1960s, Nikita Khrushchev proposed a troika arrangement for UN governance, including the creation of three secretary-generals to represent the differing perspectives of East, West, and the Non-Aligned Movement. Such an initiative was angrily rebuffed by the West, and led no where. Similarly, the Western-led effort in the same period to deprive the Soviet Union of its vote in the General Assembly due to its refusal to pay for peace-keeping operations that it opposed was eventually abandoned as futile. The Organization lived with the cold war after these failed efforts to exert control, limping along, but managing to remain useful, at least as a talking shop, in relation to its less visible humanitarian activities, and as support for the priorities of the South.

Of course, by the 1990s, the cold war came to an abrupt end, the Soviet Union collapsed into its constituent republics, and the disruptive effects of a pervasive geopolitical rivalry, reinforced by ideological antagonism, disappeared. This change of atmosphere allowed the Security Council to act cohesively in 1990-91 in response to Iraq's conquest and annexation of Kuwait, authorizing a major military response to aggression as an expression of collective security. President George Bush even proclaimed the emergence of 'a new world order' as premised upon fulfilling this promise of cooperation under UN auspices in meeting threats of international aggression.

The Gulf War 'succeeded' to the extent of restoring Kuwaiti sovereignty and independence, but it left controversy in its wake that persists to this day. Many observers within and without the UN believed that the Security Council had give the American-led coalition a blank check to conduct warfare without fully exhausting diplomatic remedies, thereby giving rise to the criticism that the Security Council had itself been 'hijacked' by the Americans. In this respect, the legitimacy of the Organization depends on its gaining greater distance from the control mechanisms of geopolitics, but

the manner of UN financing, Security Council voting, and backroom diplomacy make this prospect now seem remote.

In any event, as the prior section suggests, the end of the cold war did not bring the UN into a golden age in the peace-keeping area. China and Russia, as do many lesser states, remain sceptical about using the Organization for undertakings that infringe on territorial sovereignty. The United States seems reluctant to support the UN unless it can exert virtually unilateral control over the definition of the mission and its operational implementation. Such an attitude induced leading Western governments to bypass UN authority in fashioning a Kosovo strategy that relied on the more hospitable arena of NATO to carry out a response to Serbian ethnic cleansing. Such an experience damaged the reputation of the UN, but only briefly, as the Organization was brought back into the Kosovo picture in the post-conflict setting, as well as almost immediately being given central responsibility for difficult new peace-keeping missions in East Timor and Sierra Leone.

The other great configuration affecting the United Nations has been the North/South divide. Because of a differing agenda and a lack of influence on the Security Council, this divide has been most evident within the one state/one vote General Assembly. It was in this setting that the newly independent states from non-Western countries mounted their various attacks on the way in which international society was organized, especially its economic dimensions. This attack reached its climax in the 1970s with the demand by the non-aligned bloc of countries for 'a new international economic order'. This demand for restructuring was backed up in this period by the formidable 'oil weapon' being wielded by OPEC, and by a generally accommodating West worried about alienating leaders of the South in the overriding struggle with the East for global preeminence. The South achieved a kind of pyrrhic victory in 1974, taking the form of a Charter for the New International Economic Order and an accompanying Programme of Action. It achieved some tangible results by establishing and expanding some arenas within the UN system that were responsive to its demands for assistance in the process of development, including UNCTAD and UNDP, but also in other organizational settings as well. The normative momentum culminated in the articulation of a Right to Development that remains a relevant influence in efforts to implement the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, and underpins the now well-known support of UNDP for an orientation toward global trade and investment policy that rests on 'human security,' a deliberate challenge to a

capital-driven preoccupation that assesses 'development' and economic performance by exclusive reference to growth and efficiency trends.

But then came the 1980s with their ideological backlash led by the Thatcher/Reagan governments of Britain and the United States that included attacks on socialist thinking, non-market approaches, and 'the irresponsible majorities' mobilized in the General Assembly. This backlash was the beginning of the neoliberal consensus that took hold of world society in the 1990s, greatly strengthened by the collapse from within of the Soviet bloc and by the extraordinary developmental achievements of market-oriented countries with strong private sectors in the South, especially in the Asia-Pacific region. The North became more ideologically united around the neoliberal approach, including an effort to curtail UN activities oriented toward the normative outlooks of the South, which had been funded and established during earlier periods of cooptation by the 1980s, the South was so deeply divided that it could not mount any kind of effective resistance.

In this atmosphere, the role of the UN in promoting equitable development was eclipsed, and all efforts at criticism of capitalist approaches to growth were sidelined, if not abandoned. Symbolic was the abolition of the UN Centre on Transnational Corporations, which was targeted by Washington in the early 1990s, as potentially hostile to private sector approaches to the world economic development. Despite this general trend to downplay normative concerns in the setting of the world economy, some minor rearguard efforts went forward, but with only minimal impact. Undoubtedly, the most interesting of these counter-moves was the 1995 Copenhagen 'Social Summit' that did its best to put back on the UN agenda concerns of the peoples of the South with such social issues as unemployment, poverty, and personal insecurity. The leading UN members of the North gave this initiative only the most grudging nominal support, and so far, this challenge to neoliberalism has not amounted to much.

In conclusion, as the United Nations enters the twenty-first century neither of the two large defining cleavages so central to its activities over the last half of the twentieth century remain, at least not in their earlier, coherent form. The prevailing ideas are dominated by a fairly bland ideological agreement that has resulted in the ascendancy of the Bretton Woods approach to development and ad hoc opportunism in the context of peace and security. Whether greater concern with the social dimensions of development and a more principled approach to global security will emerge

in the years ahead are among the most salient issues confronting the United Nations at this time.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis, and its wider reverberations in Japan, Russia, and Latin America, did create some apparent exercises in rethinking by advocates of neoliberalism, including by those who led the Bretton Woods institutions. Many attempts were made to assess what had generated the collapse, as well as to criticize economistic prescriptions for recovery that caused disastrous short-term human consequences, as in Indonesia where many millions were abruptly pushed back below the poverty line. This experience led to soul-search by neoliberals, and for policy alternatives. Calls for 'a new financial architecture' and 'responsible globality' were frequently uttered to call attention to the need for more governance associated with the workings of financial markets and to emphasize the relevance of social dimensions to public sector policies. The idea of 'globalization with a human face' was put forward as a new orientation toward economic policy, and seemed to guide the World Bank and IMF leadership toward the adopting of more flexible approaches to matters of conditionality, debt repayment, and structural adjustment. With the apparent Asian recovery process now underway, this reformist mood seems to be have been dissipated before any serious substantive adjustments were made. The neoliberal consensus seems in control once more, at least until the next crisis!

5.   A NOTE ON GOVERNANCE WITHIN THE UN SYSTEM

The placement of the Bretton Woods institutions within the organizational frame of the United Nations is deeply misleading, an ambiguity that was not repeated in relation to the World Trade Organization, which enjoys a formally autonomous status. Such a status was insisted upon by the United States government to reinforce its resolve to detach the management of the world economy, to the extent possible, from the domain of the United Nations influence. For all practical purposes, the IMF and World Bank are also autonomous international actors, governed by their distinct institutional structures and accountable to their managerial boards composed of country representatives weighted to reflect proportionate capital contributions. No surprisingly, the orientation of the Bretton Woods/WTO has tended to reflect the neoliberal outlook in its purest

Northern forms, raising many questions of representativeness from the perspectives of the South. These actors have been the focus of grassroots protest activities for many years, being seen as virtual conduits for the allegedly heartless policies and priorities of private sector banks and corporations. They have also been accused of being environmentally insensitive in their endorsement of mega-projects in the name of growth-oriented development.[6]

Any deep reform of the UN system as a whole would have to extend to these hitherto nearly autonomous actors, creating a more organic link to ideas of human development favoured by other arenas within the UN, especially UNDP. Such reforms would include representation on a basis that gave some managerial voice to officials confronting massive poverty and other forms of social and environmental devastation, as well as some voice from global civil society directly accountable to the peoples of the world.

This issue of representation is accentuated by the degree to which countries in the North and private sector actors deliberately structure global economic governance in a manner that avoids accountability to or participation by the United Nations with its more avowedly *normative* or *value-oriented* agendas associated with equity and responses to human suffering arising from growing economic disparities. The annual meetings of the G-7 leaders and the gatherings of the World Economic Forum at Davos lend credibility to the view that global economic governance is fashioned by a coalition of leading private sector advocates and of ideologically passive political leaders from the world's most prosperous countries that seek to guide the global policy agenda on the basis of *technocratic* criteria.

It is evident that the significance of the Bretton Woods institutions plus the WTO is not acknowledged adequately in most formal presentations of the United Nations system. There are two ways to approach this. One would be to portray these global economic institutions as having moved to the centre of the UN scheme, displacing earlier ideas of the Organization as centred around the General Assembly or Security Council. The other way to conceive of this relationship is to treat these institutions as outside the United Nations, and linked to states in the North and to such private sector arenas as the World Economic Forum. Such a conceptualization would admit the autonomous character of these actors—being non-accountable in the UN—and avoid an artificial inclusion arising from a nominal, formal link by way of UN flow charts. Either portrayal contains a partial truth, which will be explored in the next section that considers the different 'images' of the UN system that derive

from three principal ways of depicting the hierarchy of institutions that make up the Organization.

6. FOUR IMAGES OF THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM

In most organizational presentations of the United Nations system, the General Assembly is depicted as the central organ, with the Security Council, Trusteeship Council, International Court of Justice, Economic and Social Council, and Secretariat as the five subsidiary organs comprising the core operation of the United Nations (see Appendix: Figure 1). Radiating from this core, by way of the Economic and Social Council, are the specialized agencies and several commissions, while other subsidiary bodies are attached directly to the General Assembly. It is true that the General Assembly is the UN organ with the widest substantive mandate, with all members represented, and with annual sessions that attract heads of state and prominent officials. When the Security Council has been deadlocked, or when the agenda has been dominated by issues other than peace and security, then the General Assembly has been in the limelight.

At the same time, such a depiction of the system seems misleading in some fundamental respects. For one thing, the overall rationale for the UN and the continuing perception of its success and failure is very much related to the roles assigned to the Security Council. For another, by deliberate design, only the Security Council can make 'decisions' binding on the entire membership, and it is only in the Security Council that the geopolitical actors are given permanent membership and a veto. By contrast, the General Assembly has only recommendatory authority, which can be obtained by a two-thirds majority vote, that might be composed of states representing a very small percentage of either the world's population, its GDP, and its financial contribution to the United Nations. Especially during the late 1960s and the 1970s when newly independent states were active in coalition, assertive in their demands directed at the market economies of the North, and the Security Council was paralysed by superpower rivalry, the General Assembly did seem to epitomize the United Nations.

Such majoritarian developments occasioned a backlash among leading countries in the North that started in the 1980s, and has continued until the present. It was partly motivated by an ideological response to the demands of the South for economic restructuring based on countervailing power

(OPEC in the 1970s) and equitable arguments for reform (Non-Aligned Movement and the campaign to establish a New International Economic Order). With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the cold war, the spread of market-oriented constitutionalism among the countries of the South, and the rise of neoliberal economic globalization, the General Assembly has been again eclipsed.

The Security Council reemerged in the late 1980s and 1990s as the lynchpin of the UN, with great media attention given to a large expansion of UN peace-keeping activities in many countries, and a deliberate effort spearheaded by the P-5 to focus UN budgetary and administrative reform on 'downsizing' organizational commitments to the developmental priorities of the South (see Appendix: Figure 2).

It is also possible to conceive of the Bretton Woods institutions, with the addition of World Trade Organization, as the central player in the United Nations system (see Appendix: Figure 3). Although normally portrayed as part of the periphery occupied by specialized agencies, the IMF/World Bank are arguably the most influential and consequential part of the Organization. Their influence is felt by many governments, and their policy and authority are supported by financial leverage, geopolitical authority, and ideological consensus. Such a view of the UN system is admittedly idiosyncratic, especially as the Bretton Woods actors operate so autonomously in relation to the rest of the UN, as to be often perceived as actually *outside* the system.

The final image is partly futuristic, taking account of possible institutional reforms (global peoples assembly; economic security council) and of the importance of economic global governance (IMF, World Bank, and WTO). It conceives of the United Nations system as significantly renewed by incorporating both the democratizing demands of transnational social forces and the marketizing requirement of globalization.

Each of these four images reveals a partial reality, and none is entirely satisfactory on its own. On balance, the second image, based on the peace and security agenda, with the Security Council as the presiding organ, seems to be the most accurate of the three. After all, the establishment of the United Nations, as was the case with its predecessor, the League of Nations, was overwhelmingly a response to war and a quest for a more peaceful world. Also, as a matter of public perception, the success and failure of the UN seems principally connected with its ability to keep the peace and protect its members from aggression. As well, the constitutional

arrangements of the Charter, do seem to be far more sensitive to power configurations and organizational responsibilities in relation to the Security Council than anywhere else in the system. Thus, while a combination of the three images is helpful, it seems correct to view the second image as the most consistently illuminating, especially, as in this project, since the Bretton Woods actors are viewed as distinct from the UN. Further, the current climate of opinion in the Organization seems to be in favour of minimizing the UN role in the promotion of human development and global social priorities.

7.   THE UNITED NATIONS AS A CONTESTED POLITICAL ARENA

As mentioned, in 1945 the structure of world order was very much dominated by sovereign states, and by Western ideas and arrangements, including vast overseas colonial empires. At first, the only important tension within the United Nations was between the socialism of the Soviet bloc and the market constitutionalism of the Atlantic Alliance. No doubt, partly because the Soviet group of UN members was much smaller than its Atlanticist rivals, Moscow was particularly insistent on respect for sovereign rights and the non-intervention norm. In this respect, the UN from the outset was a creation and creature of the state system of diplomacy, an instrument of statecraft, and a club of states that limited full access to states.

Membership in the United Nations resulted in some significant formal abridgements of sovereignty, especially for 'normal states', that is, other than the P-5. For these normal states, decisions could be made in the Security Council that affected their vital interests, despite the absence of their agreement or even participation. And even the General Assembly, as the conscience of the world community, could mobilize pressures that exerted influence on matters about which important states felt deeply, as seemed to be the case in relation to Chinese representation or during the latter stages of the anti-apartheid campaign. Yet by and large, the UN was and remains a bastion of statism, even more so in some respects than at the time of its creation. It now incorporates the former colonies from Africa and Asia, extending its statist reach to embrace virtually the entirety of the planet. The formal proceedings of all parts of the UN system are restricted in their participation to states, and only states.

This statist model of organization is confronting three important challenges as a result of the emergence of new actors and organizational claims. These challenges have been widely interpreted as resulting in the decline (or at least the change in the role) of the state, and have cast doubt on the legitimacy and adequacy of a United Nations based on a membership that is strictly limited to states.

The first set of challenges are associated with the great and growing influence exerted by international NGOs and generally by transnational voluntary association of various sorts.[7] There is much writing evaluating these initiatives, and whether there is in gestation a new political reality that can be described as 'global civil society' or alternatively, as 'globalization-from-below'.[8] The Charter makes a minimal gesture of acknowledgement in the extremely limited setting of the Economic and Social Council with respect to NGOs in Article 71, proposing 'suitable arrangements for consultation with non-governmental organizations which are concerned with matters within its competence'. Informally, civil society actors have been effectively active in a variety of UN arenas, especially in relation to the great global conferences of the early 1990s on policy issues and in lawmaking settings, particularly on environment and human rights. At the same time, given the importance widely attributed to these transnational civic initiatives and the growing support for global democracy, the UN is seen as not providing sufficient formal and effective access to this dimension of international political life.[9]

The second important area of formal exclusion involves the direct representation in some form of global market forces, the business and finance actors that have given shape and direction to economic globalization, capital-driven 'globalization-from-above'. Arguably, given the orientation of many governments and of the Bretton Woods institutions, these perspectives have sufficient access and influence by way of indirect representation and influence, and do not need, or even desire, any more direct form of participation in the United Nations system. At the 1992 Rio Conference on Environment and Development part of the budget was covered by a Business Council composed of CEOs from world corporations, which was active at the conference and has continued to operate in relation to the Commission on Sustainable Development. Also, there have been discussions about financing part of the UNDP budget on the basis of voluntary contributions from the private sector.

In a widely publicized initiative, the media billionaire, Ted Turner, pledged $1 billion a few years ago to cover a selected group of issues involving UN humanitarian activities. The financing crisis of the United Nations, arising from non-payment of dues and arrears by leading members, has encouraged options involving various strategies of 'privatization,' an aspect of a broader trend toward transferring responsibility from the public sector to the private sector. Most controversially, there are privatizing initiatives of a mercenary character in the peace-keeping field, especially in Africa where private companies, such as Executive Outcomes, have taken on peace-keeping roles as profit-making ventures in the face of internal strife. Such a disturbing development has occurred partly to re-employ the security operatives from the apartheid regime in South Africa and partly to fill the vacuum created by the decline of great power interest in sub-Saharan Africa.

There is also the matter of taking account of arenas that have been formed by private sector initiative to exert influence on global policy. The Global Economic Forum that meets annually at Davos, Switzerland, is currently the most prominent of these arenas. Presumably, in recognition of its relevance, the UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has addressed the Forum each year prior to 2000. The main burden of his remarks has been the need of the United Nations to find ways to take account of the less statist character of international society. In 1998 Mr Annan proposed a double 'partnership,' first between the UN on one side and the business community on the other, and secondly, between the UN and civil society. He didn't go into specifics, but strongly suggested that such partnership was necessary to ensure continued UN relevance. In 1999 Mr Annan moved in a complementary direction, urging business actors to comply voluntarily with international standards applicable to environmental, labour, and human rights even when not obliged to do so by states within which operations were occurring. He pledged UN collaboration in such efforts, and seemed to be proposing such action as a move toward the negotiation of a global social contract based on a novel idea of private sector 'global citizenship'.

One expression of the potency of global market forces involves the establishment of the World Trade Organization, involving important transfers of sovereignty by states for the sake of promoting freer trade. If the logic and dynamics of globalization support institutional innovation at the global (and regional) level, then opposition will recede. It is worth comparing the obstacles to institutionalization with respect to the environment, an area where market forces prefer to rely on the self-

organizing features of markets to the establishment of a coercive regime promoting 'free trade'.

A third area of significance involves the growth of regionalism, especially in Europe over the course of the last half century. The Charter seeks to accommodate regional actors in Chapter X, especially with respect to their role in peace and security based on the primacy of the Security Council. Whether the NATO initiatives in Kosovo permanently disrupt this relationship is uncertain at this point, but at minimum suggest the need to rethink coordination between the Security Council and enforcement under the aegis of regional organizations. The issue has arisen before on several occasions during the cold war when the Soviet Union used the Warsaw Pact to validate interventions in Eastern Europe and the United States relied on SEATO authorization for Vietnam and other regional mandates for Caribbean interventionary activities.

Perhaps, the more consequential issue arising from regionalism is one of representation and restructuring. In some sense, if the European Union were to occupy a permanent seat in the Security Council, it would pave the way for expanded non-Western representation, as well as giving non-represented 'nations' in Europe a sense that their identities were less violated than by way of statist patterns of representation. If regionalism evolves further in other parts of the world, then it would seem desirable to find ways to enable their formal participation *as regions* in a wide range of UN activities.

As far as I know, Kofi Annan has yet to include regional actors in his speculations about the necessary outreach of a revitalized United Nations. A better incorporation of regionalism within the UN system would fit with his general appreciation that it is important to take organizational account of the rise of international actors other than states in this period since the founding of the United Nations. Of course, there is a certain degree of ambivalence in UN circles about the merits of mega-regionalism as it could be understood as a rival approach to global governance rather than as an aspect of a UN-led world order. A world of regions could evolve either as a complement or as an alternative to an augmented United Nations, but the regional dimension cannot be any longer neglected in analysing prospects for global governance.

There is no assurance that regionalism would operate in a more democratic manner than the United Nations. Indeed, there have been complaints about the democratic deficit in Europe and the non-accountability and non-

transparency of the European Commission in Brussels. At the same time, the future of regionalism is tied closely to the European experience, and this experience clearly emphasizes the importance of a shared commitment to democracy as a foundation for further integrative steps. By democracy, the main emphasis has been upon democracy in state/society relations, but there are glimmerings of a growing acceptance of democratic practices in relations between member states and the European Union. The evolution of European Parliament and the acceptance by members of external accountability with respect to economic disputes and human rights suggest the democratization of regionalism in a manner and depth that remains inconceivable for the United Nations.

It is also unclear as to whether regionalism will displace or complement the United Nations in the years ahead. The most likely expectation is that the relationship will vary with the subject-matter. In peace-keeping there has seemed to be a complementary relationship in Africa, but a somewhat competitive one in relation to Balkans' peace-keeping in the 1990s. In more functional areas, such as environment and economic relations, the prospects remain good for cooperative relations between the UN and regional actors.

8.   RECONSIDERING COLD WAR GRIDLOCK

The generally disappointing UN performance on peace and security was explained and excused by reference to the cold war. After all, the original understanding of the UN rested on an acceptance of the idea that collective security could only operate on the basis of a P-5 consensus. Accordingly, with the end of the cold war, there was the hope that the UN could finally fulfil this more ambitious role contemplated by the UN Charter. Such an expectation seemed confirmed when the Gulf Crisis of 1990 gave way to a political consensus that was translated in the Gulf War into a recovery of Kuwaiti sovereignty. It then seemed natural to believe that the UN was finally entering a golden age of P-5 cooperation, which would feature the flourishing of collective security. And then when the Security Council proceeded to endorse humanitarian missions to overcome internal conflicts in several countries in the early 1990s, this sense of an emergent strong UN peaked.

Unfortunately, it soon became clear that such optimism about the UN was ill-founded and premature. The Gulf War quickly came to be seen as a job

half done, and carried out in a manner that contained disturbing implications. It was soon evident that despite the Security Council mandate, the war itself amounted to an exercise in traditional alliance diplomacy, with only the most nominal participation by the UN. There was little or no reliance on a collaborative process of the sort contemplated by Chapter VII of the Charter. Once the UN mandate was given, it functioned virtually as a signal for the American-led coalition to embark on a war, control its parameters, define its goals, and negotiate its termination.

The Security Council moves in the direction of humanitarian intervention also ran into formidable obstacles. These undertakings were UN ventures bearing on situations of *intranational* strife or emergency. By conception, such undertakings were constitutionally controversial due to the domestic jurisdiction provision of Article 2(7) of the Charter, and the attachment to its strict interpretation by a sovereignty-oriented group of states led by China. This limitation on UN authority written into the Charter was a pledge given particularly to weaker states, but also at the time to large states such as the Soviet Union likely to be outvoted, that their territorial sovereignty would not, under *any* circumstances, be subject to challenge as a result of becoming members of the United Nations. The counter-argument also seemed strong: given the evolution of international human rights in the course of several decades, governments had effectively accepted over time an erosion of this limitation on UN authority, and had submitted themselves to the possibility of humanitarian intervention in the event of gross and massive violation of fundamental human rights or in situations of chaos in which large portions of the citizens found that their basic rights, including the right to life, were in jeopardy. Such a reinterpretation of the Security Council role, while generally endorsed by the West and successive secretary-generals (Perez de Cueller, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, and Kofi Annan) remains controversial. It has never accepted in Asia where there existed the contrary view that human rights violations and humanitarian emergencies, even of an acute variety, could never justify a UN intervention in internal affairs. In Asia, suspicion abounds about the renewal of Northern dominance of the region under the aegis of 'human rights' and 'humanitarian intervention'. The riposte of the North has been that such concerns are but a diversionary move to hide the refusal to uphold international human rights standards. As with many such disputes, both sides seem to be right. The fundamental matter remains in a condition of constitutional flux.

Additionally, decisive political problems arose that have mooted the constitutional controversy, at least for the present. It became obvious first in relation to Somalia, and then more blatantly with respect to Bosnia and Rwanda, that the P-5, and especially the United States, did not possess the political will to engage in effective forms of humanitarian intervention. As Kosovo in 1999 shows, such will for a variety of reasons seems abundantly present when NATO acts, because the credibility of this prince of alliances is a strategic interest for geopolitical actors that must be upheld at all costs. But even here, it is upheld in a manner that has deepened the tragedy of those for whom the intervention is supposedly being undertaken. NATO bombed extensively for 78 days without committing ground forces, thereby insulating vicious patterns of retaliation against the Kosovar community. Beyond this, NATO focused its initial bombing almost exclusively on anti-aircraft capabilities rather than Serb military forces, conveying the impression that the safety of NATO flight crews were given clear priority over the fate of Kosovars.

And of course, by shifting humanitarian intervention from the collective frame of the Security Council to that of NATO, the undertaking evades vetoes by China and Russia, but at a constitutional and political cost. It is evident, that such a path contravenes the Charter idea clearly expressed in Article 53 that regional enforcement activity is never legally permissible without Security Council approval. As such, the UN has been bypassed by this NATO operation, as rarely so blatantly before in the course of its history. Such a sidelining of the UN is only partly explained by the fact that China and Russia deeply opposed recourse to the use of force against Yugoslavia. The West was also convinced that NATO was more capable than the UN of bringing force to bear effectively based on earlier experiences in Bosnia. Also, it seemed geopolitically advantageous to give the mandate to NATO, which was in any event casting about for a role since it had lost its *raison d'être* after the collapse of any Soviet threat to Europe. Of course, in defence of evading the Security Council was the perception of urgency based on Belgrade's repressive policies in Kosovo that were assuming genocidal proportions. In such a setting, some sort of humanitarian response, regardless of constitutional niceties, had become a moral and political imperative.

Despite this discouraging picture of UN marginalization, it still seems useful to consider the case for adjustments of the United Nations system that would make the Organization more effective in the early twenty-first century. The balance of opinion as to the UN could shift quickly, especially

if the traditional non-UN approaches to peace and security come to be regarded as self-destructive and policy failures. It is also possible that a surge of public support could at some point induce political leaders to engage more fully and creatively with the United Nations, including the provision of more independent financing and peace-keeping arrangements.

9. CHALLENGES AND RESPONSES: TWO EXAMPLES

Of course, in the history of the United Nations, there have been many challenges directed at institutional style, capacity, and orientation. Some of the most complex and difficult challenges have been produced by changes in the global setting, particularly in relation to geopolitical alignment. The onset and then the termination of the cold war were undoubtedly the most decisive changes associated with the United Nations system, especially as conceived from the perspective of the second image of Security Council dominance. The cold war involved a deep geopolitical cleavage that interfered with the capacity of the UN to achieve consensus on a wide range of issues, especially those involving contest peace and security questions. The difficulty of injecting UN peace-keeping into an East/West contested situation became evident in relation to the Congo crisis of 1960, and its aftermath.

The end of the cold war did not mean the end of geopolitical disputes and divergencies, but it did make many previously gridlocked issues available for potential UN response. The Gulf War manifested the potential for consensus, but it also served as a warning sign that seems to have made many states more reluctant to give a blank check to UN action of an enforcement nature. Also, the problems of political will associated with the proposed humanitarian operations under UN auspices in relation to Somalia, Bosnia, and Rwanda made it clear that consensus was not enough to ensure an effective UN response. It was also important to have sufficient resolve to mobilize the means or capabilities required to have a reasonable prospect of attaining the desired goal. It has become clear in the 1990s that the P-5 were not prepared to satisfy this condition in humanitarian settings even if a consensus could be obtained in support of a UN undertaking.

But other challenges to the United Nations system derived from other sources, especially from the various effects of decolonization and from the appearance of new concerns on the global policy agenda. With

decolonization came a new focus on the concerns of the South. This concern took a variety of forms, including an emphasis on development and economic assistance. By the 1970s these concerns became increasingly militant, representing more than an effort not to be drawn into the cold war, but to reform the terms of trade between North and South, and generally establish what was claimed to be a more equitable set of relations affecting global economic policy. This campaign was crystallized around the call for a 'new international economic order' (NIEO), an effort reinforced by the use of OPEC influence to raise world oil prices, moves that caused gas lines in the West and created the novel impression that the North might be vulnerable to initiatives taken by way of the coordinated action of the South. 'The oil weapon' was wielded within the halls of the UN, especially at the Sixth Special Session of the General Assembly, devoted to the call for a NIEO. The result was a series of normative instruments purporting to set a new framework for North/South relations based on greater fairness and mutuality than in the past, weakening international legal protection of foreign investment, but mainly dealing with tone and atmospherics. There was little of a substantive nature in this normative assault, enabling most countries in the North to go along with these pronouncements without feeling that their present conduct was being questioned or that they had undertaken to act differently in the future.[10]

The fact that a new normative architecture is set forth without any prospect of substantive results is not by itself discrediting of a UN initiative, or evidence that the General Assembly is a toothless giant. I think such an assessment could be made of the early efforts of the UN to internationalize the subject-matter of human rights, and yet over time this undertaking has to be ranked with leading UN achievements.[11] But the campaign to create the NIEO must be assessed as a disabling failure. It prompted an ideological/geopolitical backlash led by Reagan/Thatcher forces during the 1980s. It overstated the solidarity of the South and did not take account of the degree to which socialism and state-directed economies were in retreat all over the world. And most of all, unlike with human rights, there was neither civil society reinforcement of the inter-governmental momentum or some degree of geopolitical opportunism at work (as had helped give human rights degrees of potency in various settings such as in relation to mounting Western pressure against the oppressive regimes of Eastern Europe). And so the NIEO seemed like empty confrontational rhetoric that was not related to any viable political project. When the oil weapon disappeared and OPEC disunity surfaced, the final nail was hammered into the NIEO coffin. The NIEO experience does show how the UN General

Assembly can be mobilized for sweeping reform, but also how such efforts can end in frustration if there is either a political backlash or an absence of follow-through.

This failure to reform the world economy as such should not detract from the success of the South with respect to the enactment of supportive normative guidelines by way of a series of General Assembly initiatives. As early as 1962, the General Assembly adopted a resolution on 'permanent sovereignty over natural resources' that was supposed to put the rights of a people ahead of those of foreign investors, regardless of contractual arrangements.[12] The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights also affirms the importance of ensuring each person in every country basic human needs.[13] And perhaps most relevant of all, the adoption in 1986 of a comprehensive Declaration on the Right of Development.[14] The success of the South, at a normative level of discourse, was to establish the goal of development as a policy imperative that could not be trumped even by invoking market efficiency factors. This must be counted as a limited victory, as it was not possible to move from the right to development to specific reforms that might facilitate what the UNDP called 'pro-growth development' in its *Human Development Reports* or what Chile claimed to be 'growth with equity'.

The UN story pertaining to the new agenda of environment, population, and resources tells a different, generally more positive story about the creative capacity of the General Assembly to respond to the felt needs of the peoples of the world. The idea of organizing a global inter-governmental conference on a broad policy concern under UN auspices was an expansion of activities explicitly foreseen. The 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, despite a variety of difficulties, was a major contribution in several respects. It greatly raised environmental awareness among the governments and peoples of the world, and was thus an invaluable learning experience. Such learning occurred in the preparatory process, at the conference itself, and in its aftermath. Many governments established ministries of environmental affairs or bureaucratic units devoted to environmental policy. The UN itself established UNEP as an expression of continuing concern, which was less than environmentalists hoped for, but more than what had existed. The transnational environmental movement made its debut at Stockholm, capturing the imagination of many among the assembled media, and suggesting the presence of new non-state actors as real social forces. And the UN displayed a capacity to promote consciousness-raising with respect to emergent global challenges. The

Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, although non-binding in a legal sense, was an immense contribution to the creation of a normative architecture for environmental protection, and has served as a building block for subsequent international law efforts.

The Stockholm conference also disclosed problems. It became evident that organizers had not addressed the North/South dimension of environmentalism in a reconciling manner. Many from the South believed that the stress on environmental dangers, especially those associated with industrialism, were being invoked intentionally or unwittingly, to inhibit the drive to develop poor countries as rapidly as possible. Governments confronted by massive poverty and capital scarcity did not want to accept responsibility for expensive restrictions on industrial and agricultural activities. The insensitive militancy of environmental activists from Northern voluntary organizations also contributed to an atmosphere of North/South tensions. Also, much of the citizen activism in relation to the governmental undertakings seemed overly confrontational. Finally, the geopolitical dimension was evident at Stockholm, especially in view of the exclusion of environmental harm caused by war from the agenda, given the sensitivities surrounding this concern that arose from some of the tactics relied upon by the United States in the Vietnam War.

But the idea of UN-sponsored global conferences took off. Other conferences in the 1970s and 1980s were held on population policy, on food, on human habitat, and on women. Although somewhat less visible than the Stockholm event, these conferences exhibited the virtues associated with Stockholm and avoided some of the weaknesses, making a special effort to take account of developmental priorities of the South. And then came the 1990s, and a series of highly orchestrated UN conferences were arranged, with strong provision for participation by global civil society. The Rio Conference on Environment and Development held in 1992, twenty years after Stockholm, was the most elaborate world conference ever held, and managed to attract both more heads of state than any prior international event and more civil society activists. It also gave an explicit role to business leaders, recognizing the relevance and importance of market forces to environmental protection. Benefiting from the report of the Brundtland Commission that had been widely distributed within the UN system, the North/South divide was significantly lessened. This was signalled by adopting the name 'environment and development' for the conference as compared to the Stockholm name of 'human environment'.[15] The reconciling idea of 'sustainable development' was widely endorsed as

the guiding concept, and it was understood that 'poverty' would be treated as a form of 'pollution'.

A new normative framework was adopted in the form of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, and some progress was made on such broad issues as climate change, biodiversity, and the protection of forests. The Declaration, in comparison with that adopted in Stockholm, does contain explicit reference to indigenous peoples, women, and youth as constituencies with special concerns and potential contributions relative to environmental process. Also, Rio was sensitive to the importance of follow-through, formulating an elaborate action programme in the form of Agenda 21 that included cost estimates for each recommended course of action, as well as establishing a 'commission for sustainable development' with periodic meetings to monitor implementation of the programme of action.

But again there were problems. At Rio it was the rich countries of the North that seemed most worried, fearing that either their life style would be cramped or criticized, or that they would be asked to pay most of the costs for environmental clean-up. There was also the feeling that civil society perspectives were being 'handled' rather than 'addressed', and that arrangements for participation were designed for 'cooption' rather than 'dialogue'. Yet again the main impression was one of learning and policy impact, especially by media attentiveness. The UN organized and sponsored several other mega-conferences in the succeeding years: human rights in Vienna (1993); population in Cairo (1994); social summit in Copenhagen (1995); women in Beijing (1995); and, habitat in Istanbul (1996). All of these conferences linked their efforts explicitly to development, and each attracted major civil society inputs. Indeed, the impact of civil society initiatives at Cairo and Copenhagen challenged many governmental perspectives both substantively and in terms of process. As a result, there has been a backlash. UN conferences on broad issues of global policy are not likely to occur in the near future. The official explanation will be that such conferences were 'expensive jamborees' that accomplished little, and were thus good targets for the budget-slashers. My own interpretation of the backlash is different, and stresses the extent to which the UN conference arenas were losing their statist character, and becoming 'dangerous' experiments in global democracy.

Whether such conferences will be held in the future, and whether they will be inclusive of civil society and market perspectives, is an important uncertainty about the UN role early in the twenty-first century. Surely the

need persists for consciousness-raising and the provision of broad normative frameworks useful for resolving more specific controversies. And surely, the democratic spirit of the times is not likely to exempt UN activities indefinitely. But whether the present downsizing approach can be effectively challenged in relation to the UN role in providing the auspices for global conference diplomacy is not at all clear at this point.

10. TOWARD A MORE LEGITIMATE AND EFFECTIVE UNITED NATIONS

To simplify matters, reformist energies need to be understood in relation to two overriding goals: a more legitimate United Nations and a more effective United Nations. The Organization, in general, will operate more legitimately and appear to be doing so in relation to three standards of assessment: (1) acting in accordance with the United Nations Charter, including its broad constitutional principles and objectives; (2) achieving representativeness in relation to the peoples of the world, particularly on the Security Council, and operating in a manner that embodies democratic practices of participation, transparency, and accountability; (3) moving toward political independence in relation to the most powerful geopolitical actors in the world, which will depend on the avoidance of 'double standards' in responding to circumstances of conflict and emergency and on staffing its bureaucracy with international civil servants who possess integrity and competence.

The quest for UN effectiveness is a matter of ensuring that the Organization has the capabilities and political will to carry out its various missions.[16] At times, as arguably in the Gulf War, effectiveness is achieved at the expense of legitimacy. UN effectiveness is partly a matter of money, but it is mainly a matter of achieving the requisite degree of support from its members, especially the permanent members of the Security Council. The UN can only hope to be effective to the extent that these members are in substantial agreement about specific undertakings and overall organizational role, although there are various opportunities for bargaining and compromises if there is a commitment to effectiveness and to the goals of humane global governance.

It is increasingly important in achieving legitimacy and effectiveness for the UN to be strongly supported by relevant sectors of global civil society

and the most influential media commentary and coverage. There is no doubt that 'the CNN factor' shapes perceptions of legitimacy and effectiveness, not only for large parts of the public, but also for many leaders. It is a subtle matter as various political tendencies also use the media to advance their particular agendas.

As stressed earlier, the outlook for significant institutional reform does not appear to be bright at present. Yet the future potential of the United Nations system cannot begin to be realized without some significant adjustment to changing global realities. In brief, a United Nations created in 1945 to serve the interests of the then largely Western group of states that continued to govern many peoples by colonial title. This world order has been significantly transformed by the universality of participation by independent sovereign states, by policy agendas shaped in response to multiple forms of global interconnectedness, and by the emergence of global civil society and of global market forces that often manage to elude the regulatory mechanisms of the state system.

Accordingly, it seems appropriate to offer a few recommended institutional modifications despite an appreciation that their attainment is not likely within the short run. At the same time, it is important not to be captive of projective thinking that measures future possibilities by the present outlook. From such a projective perspective, the movement against colonialism would never have been entertained, nor the emancipation of the countries of East Europe from Soviet dominion, nor the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa, nor the political independence of East Timor. Defining what the UN needs, as well as taking account of the current set of circumstances, guides the following set of illustrative recommendations.[17]

10.1   Independent financing

The idea of separating UN funding to some extent from government contributions has been around for a long time. Whether to tax transnational financial transactions or some use of the global commons or arms sales has also been debated for years. The financing pressures on the UN in recent years as a result of the non-payment of dues and assessments provide an additional rationale for restructuring UN financing arrangements at this time. Also, the weakness of political will in humanitarian settings suggests that an enhanced UN role in the future depends in part on a financing structure that is independent from P-5 control.

For these reasons, it is important to renew the recommendation to seriously explore the prospect for various alternative modes of partial independent financing. Success here would both contribute to the overall effectiveness of the UN system but would also be understood as a loosening of the reins of political control now exercised by the strongest member states. Precisely for this reason, it is important to realize that the issue of financing is less about money than political control. Once this is realized, it makes plain why the resistance of some governments is so intense, and why only a mobilization of even stronger counter-pressures of civil society in those same countries is likely to make independent financing a feasible project.

10.2   Volunteer peace force

To enable more reliable Security Council responses, especially in the setting of humanitarian challenges of small or medium scale, the establishment of a high quality UN volunteer peace force would be of great benefit. It would allow the Organization to respond without expecting member states to expose their citizens to loss of life. It would tend to depoliticize such undertakings, and yet provide the UN Security Council with a mechanism to extend rapidly collective security responses to situations of severe humanitarian emergency.

The character of such a force, and its administrative relation to the UN system would have to be worked out in great detail. It would be an expensive undertaking if done in a professionally responsible manner. The coordination of control between the Security Council and the secretary-general would be an important concern of members if such an initiative moved beyond the proposal stage. Again, major sovereign states are reluctant to allow peace-keeping capabilities come into existence that might not be subject to their political control. And as with financing, the pressures from civil society will be crucial to shape a setting in which sympathetic leaders can accept some loss of sovereign authority. Of course, the payoff for such states is a shift of responsibility away from themselves in situations where the pressure to act is great, but the absence of strategic interests makes any substantial commitment difficult to justify.

Despite practical obstacles, the case for a UN volunteer force drawn from many countries seems strong at this point. Resistance from P-5 governments, reluctant to give up their current measure of control over UN peace-keeping, is likely to persist, but it might dissipate in due course, given disenchantment with alternative approaches.

10.3 Global peoples assembly

Modelled somewhat on the European Parliament, and designed to give the peoples of the world more meaningful opportunities for participation in the UN system, it is proposed that a 'peoples assembly' would help to diminish the so-called 'democratic deficit' in the United Nations.[18] This new organ could be structured to be a parallel body to that of the General Assembly.[19] It would be the voice of global civil society, providing a great testing ground for the practice of global democracy.

Here, too, problems of organization and conception are complex and opposition can be expected to be formidable. The current secretary-general, Kofi Annan, has supported the convening of a 'peoples millennium assembly' in the year 2000. It is a low-priority project, to meet only on a single occasion, but its advocacy expressed the desirability of having the peoples of the world participate more directly and democratically in the work of the United Nations. At this point, it is uncertain whether this millennium assembly will spark a movement to achieve some more regular institutionalization, and if so, on what basis.

There are some experiments along these lines that suggest the operational feasibility of the idea. There have been three Assemblies of the Peoples of the United Nations held in alternate years in Perugia, Italy. Delegates come from as many as 140 countries, their participation financed by a coalition of municipalities in Italy, each of which takes responsibility for paying travel and accommodation costs of one or more delegate from a non-Western country. The result is a stimulating confirmation of the extent to which such a democratizing initiative brings to the surface a different set of grievances and aspirations than those deriving from inter-governmental or even NGO circles.

10.4 Economic security council

One proposal that has received prominent endorsement is the idea of establishing an 'economic security council'.[20] Such a new organ for the United Nations would acknowledge the increasing importance of the economic dimensions of world order, as well as the current insufficiency of institutional arrangements for economic governance at the global level. In part, such a proposal seeks to ensure that the United Nations possesses an arena suitable for the formation of global economic policy and capable of providing regulatory authority as needed.

Perhaps, the most compelling rationale for an economic security council relates to security dimensions of the world economy. The Asian financial crisis of 1997 disclosed how abruptly the economic vulnerability of countries in the South can result in massive suffering for large proportions of the population. Indonesia, probably the hardest hit of the Asian countries, was confronted with a humanitarian catastrophe, with some 50 per cent of its population being pushed well below subsistence in the months after brunt of the Asian financial crisis and the prescribed IMF medicine were felt. An economic security council would be tasked with addressing the social and environmental effects of world economic developments.

Of course, the prospects for establishing an economic security council are not currently favourable. Rich countries favour addressing global economic issues outside the United Nations, and have established their own arenas, including the Annual Economic Summit (G-7), the World Economic Forum, the World Trade Organization, among others. It is likely that the permanent members of the Security Council would regard the idea of an economic security council as a threat to their institutional primacy. Also, the bargaining to construct an economic security council that took account of varying levels of influence and yet was representative of the peoples of the world would undoubtedly strain diplomatic capabilities to their limits. Such strain would be greater, still, if efforts were made to eliminate the veto and ensure access for certain NGOs and private sector representatives in the formal workings of the new organ. But the existence of practical and political obstacles is no reason to bury an idea, whose realization could bring great benefit to the global public good.

11. CONCLUSION

The full range of institutional adjustments that would strengthen the capacity of the UN system to respond to the range of challenges is beyond the scope of this paper. The proposals sketched were chosen for illustrative purposes, and because they seemed responsive to the most salient current weaknesses. Omitted was the much discussed reform of the Security Council, both in relation to membership and the exercise of the veto. Until the Security Council incorporates the changes in the composition of international society wrought by the collapse of colonialism and the rise of non-Western civilizations, the entire Organization will remain under a shadow of anachronistic Euro-centrism. And yet, the Charter is difficult to amend,

making it easier for countries with entrenched advantages to oppose needed adjustments. In a sense, the inability to reform the Security Council despite the magnitude of change in the global setting is symbolic of the extent to which the Charter framework reflecting the realities of 1945 hampers the effectiveness and legitimacy of the United Nations at the start of the twenty-first century.

But the Charter has proved flexible in some respects, and the overall role of the Organization has proved invaluable for all members of international society. It is notable that the UN membership now represents over 99 per cent of the people living in the world, and that no government currently conceives of its interests as better served by withdrawing from the United Nations. Such universality of participation (leaving aside the special case of Switzerland), is in contrast with selective membership and withdrawal that undermined the League of Nations from its inception in 1920.

No one knows what will prove feasible by way of reform as it becomes evident that the impact of globalization is profoundly changing perceptions, influence patterns, and aspirational priorities, as well as altering the perspectives and role of the sovereign state. The 1999 'Battle of Seattle,' although directed at the World Trade Organization, was directed against the overall pattern of global governance associated with economic globalization. Whether such protest was a flash-in-the-pan of global consciousness or an expression of a rising challenge to the manner by which the world is now organized, cannot yet be foretold. Certainly one possibility is to bring greater transparency and accountability into all aspects of UN operations. In this regard, the effectiveness and legitimacy of the UN seems likely to depend on whether it funds suitable ways to incorporate representatives of both global civil society and of global market forces into its everyday operations. In an important sense, the challenge of the first fifty years was centred on the incorporation of non-Western states. For the next fifty years the challenge will be to incorporate non-state actors. The UN must meet this challenge, or it will find its potential and actual influence ebbing away to other policy-making arenas. Such an outlook should encourage a boldness of imagination as a way of engaging world citizenry, the media, and private and public sector leaders in discussion about building a sustainable and satisfying future for the peoples of the world as we embark on a new century. Such a discussion is more necessary than ever given the rise of non-Western civilizations, making a dialogue of civilizations the only viable alternative to a clash of civilization. And what better focus for such an undertaking than building the sort of United Nations that can be of benefit to all peoples in the world.

APPENDIX

FIGURE 2
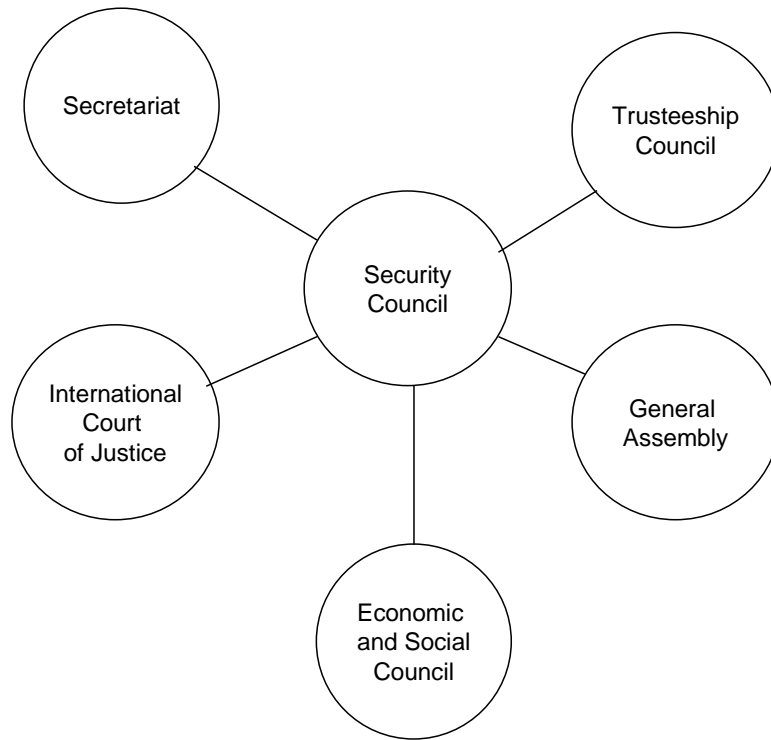GEOPOLITICAL AND MEDIA VIEW OF CORE UN SYSTEM

FIGURE 3
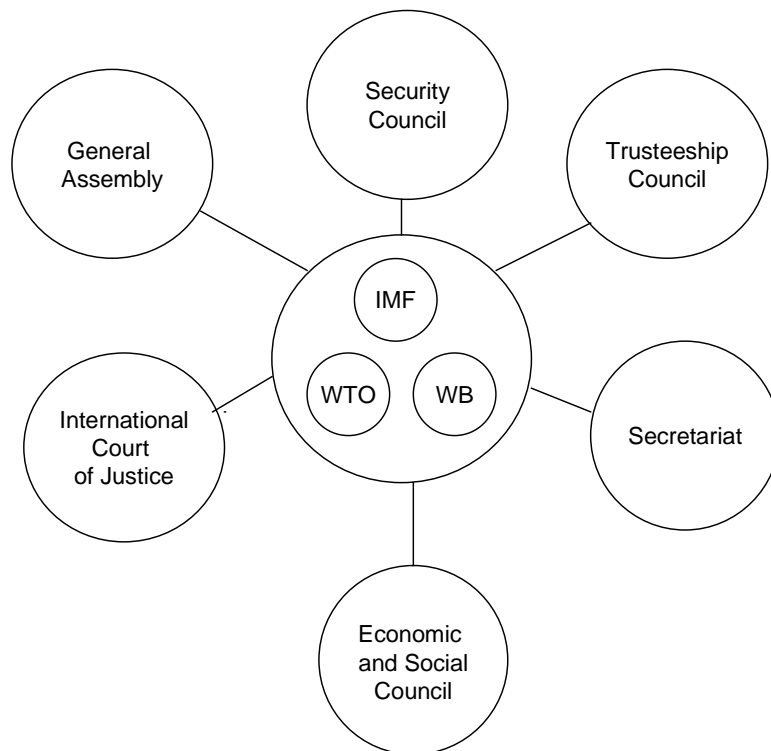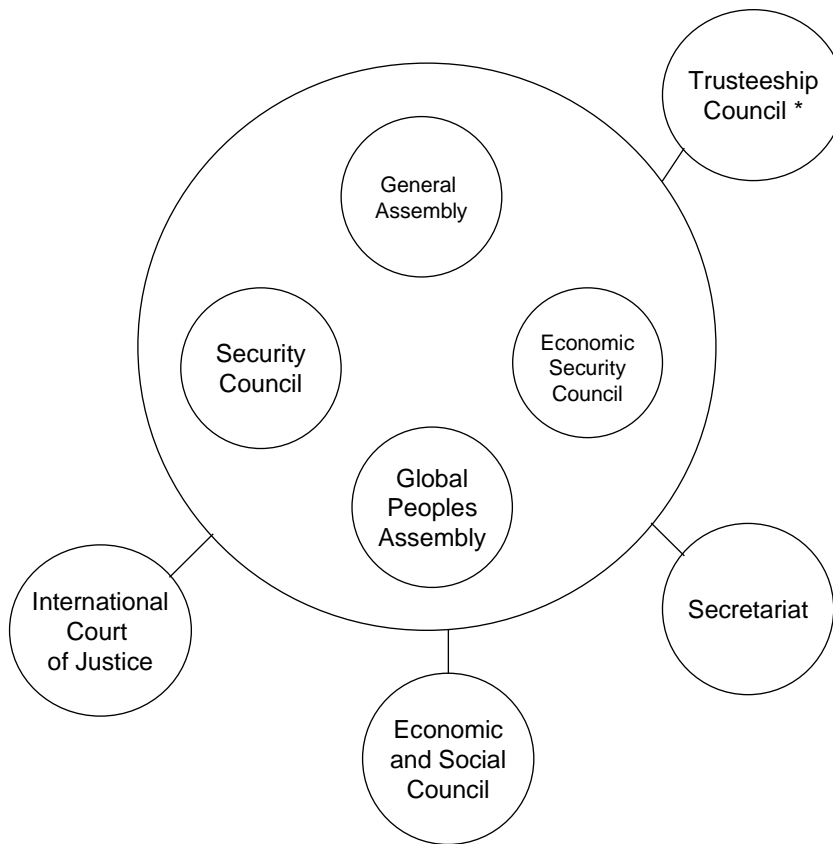IMAGE OF UN SYSTEM AS GLOBAL ECONOMIC GOVERNANCE

FIGURE 4
REFORMED IMAGE FROM GLOBAL POLITICAL GOVERNANCE
PERSPECTIVE

* This organ of the United Nations was associated with the colonial era. To keep the Trusteeship Council functional in the 21st century would require that its trust focus be shifted to upholding the rights of future generations and of indigenous peoples, and to protecting 'the common heritage' of humanity against encroachment.

NOTES

[1] According to the UN Charter, Article 2(7), the Organization was prohibited from intervening in matters 'essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of states.' This was understood to mean civil strife and conditions of oppressive government. The only qualification of this principle was the caveat that such a restriction of UN authority 'shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII.

2 For useful introductory overviews of the United Nations System, see Ziring, Riggs and Plano (2000); Mingst and Karns (1995). Also Alagappa and Inoguchi (1999) for wide-ranging interpretation of UN role in a changing global setting.

3 See Haq (1995); see also the annual volumes since 1991 containing the *Human Development Report* of UNDP, published under the imprint of Oxford University Press.

4 See proposals to convert United Nations into a form of limited world government in Clark and Sohn (1966); for general theoretical inquiry see Murphy (1999).

5 See Kaul, Grunberg and Stern (1999).

6 E.g. Rich (1994) and Broad with Cavanagh (1993).

7 See Keck and Sikkink (1998); Risse-Kappen (1995), and Smith, Chatfield and Pagnucco (1997).

8 Falk (1995).

9 Held (1995); Wapner (1996); also Falk and Strauss (1999).

10 See Declaration on the Establishment of a NIEO and Charter of Economic Rights and Duties of States in Weston *et al.* (1997: 705-16).

11 Falk (1998: 255-72).

12 GA Res. 1803, 14 Dec. 1962; see also GA Res. 3171, 17 December 1973.

13 See Art. 25, 28 of Universal Declaration and Covenant, 16 December 1966.

14 4 December 1986.

15 WCED (1987).

16 For comprehensive proposals, see report of the Commission on Global Governance (1995: esp. 225-302); Childers and Urquhart (1994).

17 Note that the most ambitious orientation toward reform, the establishment of a world government, is not even considered here. Such an exclusion is justified on practical grounds. There is no significant support for such a transformative move either at the level of grassroots or among elite opinion. At the same time, there are visionaries who continue to believe that the integrative trends of world society and the disintegrative dangers of a total ecological or geopolitical collapse make world government possible, necessary, and desirable. One such carefully presented proposal is that of Yunker (1993); see also a range of views on these issues in Harris and Yunker (1999); for the more influential ideas favouring 'global governance' as a functional and normative goal that avoids the feasibility and bureaucratic pitfalls of 'world government,' see Rosenau and Czempiel (1992) and the range of contributions to Paul and Hall (1999).

18 See Falk and Strauss (2000, 1999, and 1997) and also Commission on Global Governance (1995).

[19] The GPA would be started on an informal, experimental basis, with an annual session of one month. One approach would be to allow each member of the United Nations, on the basis of population, to establish a democratic procedure for selecting 1-10 delegates. Another approach would be to ask the Nobel Prize Committee to convene a panel of Nobel Peace Prize winners to designate a corporate body of 300 delegates representing the peoples of the world. Funding could be arranged on a decentralized basis taking account of income levels. As with the European Parliament, the early activities of the GPA would not have lawmaking effects, but as the experiment proceeded, a gradual accretion of functions and powers could be expected to occur.

[20] Jacques Delors elaborated his support for this new UN organ during his keynote address to the United Nations Seminar on 'Values and Market Economies'.

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