

Preface: “The United Nations. An Introduction”,
by Sven Gareis and Johannes Varwick, Palgrave
MacMillan 2005.

The United Nations plays a singular role in the discussion over the future of international politics. Although founded in 1945 and thus already some six decades old, the organization sometimes gives the impression that it is still in need of a founding. Whether it be peacekeeping, strengthening human rights, dealing with problems of the global environment, or the struggle against international terrorism and its manifold causes, there hardly seems to be a global problem in the world today in which the United Nations is *not* expected to play a key role. On the other hand, it is always pointed out in the very same breath that, for the UN to play its role adequately, it stands in need of reform and renewal. Moreover, a fundamental change in perspective – especially on the part of the more powerful member states – is necessary for the UN’s success. A further complaint often heard is that on especially important issues – such as the recent war in Iraq – the UN is frequently avoided or even deliberately shoved aside. It is obvious that a great gulf still exists between the UN’s actual capabilities and the strong organization which many desire it to be.

That the United Nations is sought after in its capacities as agent and as forum in such a wide spectrum of political issues is primarily attributable to the fact that the organization can boast of almost perfect universality (with 191 states as members). Also important, however, is the UN’s self-understanding as a broad global forum for international cooperation. The United Nations was created to be a comprehensive organization not only in terms of its membership, but also in terms of the breadth of its competencies. Each aspect of its work – peacekeeping, human rights, development cooperation, environmental protection, etc. – will be emphasised in turn by the people for whom those tasks take precedence. Since the very beginning, the work of the United Nations has been based on a broad concept of peace; one that goes beyond the mere prevention of war to include the improvement of

the humanitarian and social condition of humankind, the strengthening of international law, and concerns of sustainable development. In this sense, at least, the UN was astonishingly modern.

It is because of this broader concept of peace that the goals of the UN Charter comprise a much broader field of responsibility than the mere possibility of using military force against an aggressor. Other areas include the resolution of disputes by peaceful means, the search for cooperative solutions for economic, social, cultural, and humanitarian problems, and the encouragement of behaviour that accords with the principles of international law. This ambitious catalogue of goals makes it quite clear that the UN does not understand itself as a mere means to the fulfilment of a specific task, but rather envisions a qualitative change in international relations in general. The UN's concrete fields of activity have broadened considerably since the founding, without having required changes to the Charter. In the words of the current Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, for the first 45 years of its existence, the UN stood in the shadow of the Cold War, which prevented the organization from fulfilling some of its core responsibilities, but also led to the discovery of other essential tasks. But now, even the core tasks have undergone some changes of their own. For example, at the time of the founding, interstate warfare was the greatest threat to international peace and security. Today, internal conflicts and a fundamentally different concept of war are on the agenda.

It is also impossible to overlook the fact that the UN in its present form is unable to play its role adequately as motor and agent of a comprehensive politics of world order. It is thus no coincidence that reform of the UN holds a prominent place on the international agenda. Within the reform debate, a distinction can be made between reforms of organizational law, which can be made without any changes to the Charter, and constitutional reforms, which require the Charter to be amended. While numerous important projects falling under the first heading have been implemented during Kofi Annan's tenure, the hurdles facing changes of the second kind remain extremely high. Thus, with reliable regularity, some portion of the list of reform proposals is to be found on the agendas of diverse working groups of the General Assembly and Security Council, without there ever being a consensus in sight. Although there exist plentiful fundamental disagreements over the organization's precise future form and function, there is general consensus that the UN stands in need of comprehensive reform. Both the Charter and the organization itself require a basic overhaul, and what all the reform exigencies have in common is that the measures necessary to implement them can be decided upon and put into practice only by the member-states themselves. In such a situation as this, it is almost impossible to make predictions about the

chances for success of central projects such as Security Council reform.

The world organization's persistent need for reform should not, however, distract anyone from the fact that the United Nations is indispensable for the stability of the international system. Political practice unfortunately does not usually keep pace with the demands of an ever more complex listing of international problems. Sustainable solutions to humanity's chief problems in the 21st century are most likely to be found multilaterally, and in the warp and woof of international regimes and organizations, the UN plays a prominent role. However, it is also true that if the existing institutions do not manage to solve the problems of international politics, states will seek other types of solutions. Thus it is necessary for the UN to deliver realistic contributions to the solution of problems if the organization does not wish to sacrifice all its significance. If the member-states fail to support the organization more strongly and consistently, however, no success will be possible.

This book approaches its subject in nine steps, each of which is presented in a separate chapter. The individual chapters may be seen as self-contained pedagogic units, but they do of course build on one another, and a truly substantiated picture of the UN's potentialities emerges only when the book is taken as a whole.

- The first chapter presents a basic introduction to the structure of the UN . Along with an overview of the organization's historical development, the UN Charter along with the principal organs, programmes, funds, and specialized agencies will be introduced and their functions and decision-making processes explained. How the UN is financed will also be explained.
- In the second chapter , the theoretical perspective takes precedence. In this chapter we ask how an international organization's work can be conceptually classified and explained and address the challenges which arise from increasing globalization and their impact on the main tasks and functions of the UN. The third chapter focuses on the principle of collective security – one of the key elements of the UN in the area of securing international peace and security. Both the limitations and possibilities of this principle are explained, as well as the development of the general prohibition on the use of force and the way in which that principle is anchored in the Charter itself.
- The fourth chapter assesses the practical side of the UN's peacekeeping. We provide an overview of all UN peacekeeping operations to date, as well as of the strengths and weaknesses of peacekeeping generally. We also address the role of the UN in relation to disarmament, arms control, and prevention. Finally, two short case studies (the impact of international terrorism and the Iraq war) will be used to illustrate current chal-

allenges in the area of peacekeeping.

- Chapter 5 is about the protection of human rights in the framework of the UN. As in Chapter Three with peacekeeping, we will here discuss the basic questions of the normative development, codification, and definition of human rights.
- In the sixth chapter the practice of human rights protection and the relevant treaty bodies take centre stage. Newer approaches to the protection of human rights will be discussed along with the so-called humanitarian interventions and international criminal jurisdiction.
- Chapter 7 addresses an area of the UN which is often neglected due to the far higher profile (at least in the Western world) of peacekeeping and human rights. Nonetheless, we argue, work in development and on environmental issues has also become a core task of the United Nations.
- Chapter 8 moves on to consider the issue of reform and in particular the necessity and prospects for change in relation to the areas described in the preceding chapters. Along with conceptual questions of the extent and limitations of the reformability of the various UN organizations, this chapter will introduce and analyse several concrete reform proposals.
- In the final chapter, the authors attempt to pull all these strands together to produce a balance sheet of the work of the UN. This chapter raises the fundamental question of how possible it is to steer and direct international politics, introduces new concepts of global governance and multilateral cooperation, and assesses the prospects and outlook for the UN in the 21st century.

Overall our central purpose is to provide an introduction to the UN's central fields of activities, to evaluate the chances of reform in these fields, and to discuss the role of the organization in international politics.

The book is addressed primarily to students of the political and social sciences, but also to teachers and lecturers involved in political education as well as a broader circle of interested readers in politics, journalism, and the society at large. It is conceptualised in such a way that the most important organs, committees and mechanisms of the United Nations will be described in terms of their legal and institutional composition, but will also be subjected to a political science treatment of their strengths and weaknesses. Thus the book should be useful even to readers who are not yet well acquainted with the United Nations organization.

A review of the original German-language version of this book in the periodical Vereinte Nationen (United Nations) concluded that the book "conveys a clear and readable synopsis of the potentialities, advantages, weaknesses, and problems of the UN, and it is to be presumed that anyone who has read this book is now in possession of a well-founded understanding of

the United Nations.” If this is in fact the case, then we the authors have achieved our goal: to produce a challenging but readable, comprehensive but not too detail-obsessed, critical but not unfair political science analysis of the organization with all its potential and limitations.

In 2004, this book went into its third edition in the German language, and has enjoyed a widespread and positive reception in the German-speaking world. For this English version, the book has been further revised and substantially recast in line with the rather different style and approach of Anglo-American textbooks . We very much hope that the book is as well received in the English -speaking world! We will of course be grateful for any suggestions for improvement or for any information that could be useful in preparing the next edition - and particularly for any feedback arising from the use of this book on university and other courses.

The English edition has a companion web site at www.palgrave.com/politics/gareis/ which includes links to relevant web sites; the complete text of the UN charter; a full list of member states with their accession dates and current budget contributions; more detailed information on the United Nations system and its constituent organisations. We also plan to provide update material reflecting substantial changes in the organisation and functioning of the UN since completion of the book.

We would like to express our heartfelt thanks to Lindsay Cohn, who not only transformed the German manuscript into idiomatic English with great dedication and competence, but whose understanding of political science has also contributed to the clarity and readability of the content.

Kiel/Berlin, August 2004 Sven Gareis/Johannes Varwick