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# The United Nations and the Challenge of the Post-Cold War World

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In the conclusion to our 1989 report to the Academic Council on the United Nations System on the state of the UN, Professor Roger Coate and I questioned the continuing relevance of a world organization chartered in 1945 and focused programmatically on preventing a recurrence of conditions that caused World War II.<sup>1</sup> Structurally, the UN had not evolved as world conditions changed during a half century, and we therefore wondered whether the organization was capable of usefully dealing with the international issues of the late 20th Century and beyond.

Our skepticism was fueled by two observations: first, the sensitivity, creativity and practical effectiveness of the United Nations are all constrained by its intergovernmental character. The UN remains an organization of states, a club where governments meet, and this dramatically affects what it can and cannot do in important policy realms. Second, the United Nations is a global organization, and its agenda perforce focuses on global problems. While it is true that mankind does have a number of common problems, not least among them insuring survival by controlling nuclear weapons, it is also the case today that regional, national and local problems are the most urgent. The United Nations however, is not well-equipped to work below the global level either conceptually or practically.

The challenge for the United Nations today, and therefore the starting point for any serious discussion of UN reform, is how to stay relevant as an intergovernmental, global organization in a world where multilateral interactions among national governments are not appropriate approaches to many pressing problems, and where the

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An earlier version of this essay was presented at the conference on "A New World Order and the Reform of the United Nations," Kyung Hee University, Seoul, Korea, September 21-22, 1993.

<sup>1</sup>Donald J. Puchala and Roger A. Coate, *The Challenge of Relevance: The United Nations in a Changing World Environment* (Dartmouth, NH: The Academic Council on the United Nations System, 1989). While this essay proceeds from collaborative efforts between Coate and Puchala, perspectives and conclusions presented here are Puchala's alone.

majority of global issues, whatever their rhetorical worth, are mostly of marginal practical concern. Reforming the United Nations, therefore, ought to be an exercise in identifying and maximizing the Organization's comparative advantages as a policy instrument for the international community. The UN ought to do more of what it does best as an intergovernmental, global organization, and it ought to exit policy realms where its intergovernmental structure and global orientation render it less than effective.

### The UN in the Peacekeeping Niche

UN-styled intergovernmentalism still finds an apparent niche in the post-Cold War environment in the area of peacekeeping and its policy progeny, peacemaking and peacebuilding. While serious questions need to be raised about the efficacy of UN armed interventions into regional and national conflicts, such activities are being rendered imperative by post-cold war international conditions. If the first few years of the post-Cold War era are indicative of world affairs to come, we may realistically expect recurrent future conflict based upon reasserted claims for national, ethnic and religious autonomy. It is hardly necessary to rehearse how cold war political and ideological conformities, voluntary and enforced, suppressed ethnic tensions, how the superpowers controlled their clients and subdued conflicts among them, how fear and favors muted within-bloc rivalries and how allied elites supported by Washington or Moscow owed their tenure to setting bloc interests above national aspirations. Almost all of this is now over, and the result is proliferating, nationalistically-kindled disorder. Added to this is the congeries of continuing conflicts -- in Palestine, Somalia, Cambodia, Southern Africa, Nicaragua, Kashmir, Afghanistan and elsewhere -- that have carried over from the cold war era. There are also numerous simmering issues about borders in the Persian Gulf region, islands in the China Sea, water and riparian rivalries and stalemates in still-divided countries. While these post-cold war conflicts immediately threaten only those parties directly involved, many of them have escalatory potential and thus threaten more widely. Even as localized contests, they destroy lives, undermine livelihoods, lay waste to property and belie any image of peace prevailing at Francis Fukuyama's "end of history."<sup>2</sup>

For the moment, and into the foreseeable future, the UN is uniquely available for such peacekeeping assignments. Peacemaking and peacekeeping as established under Chapters VI and VII of the

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<sup>2</sup>Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?" *The National Interest* 16 (Summer, 1989), pp. 3-18.

Charter are in fact the principal *raison d'être* for the UN of the early 21st Century.

Ironically, the ending of the Cold War not only unleashed the disorders of our day, but it also presented the status quo powers with an enhanced means for dealing with them. The termination of East-West rivalry allowed the invigoration of the United Nations Security Council because the five permanent members were able, for the first time since the UN's founding, to consistently cooperate. Actions under Chapter VII of the Charter therefore became possible, and indeed have been engaged in the Gulf War and in the former Yugoslavia. In addition, because in the post-cold war era the Secretary-General of the United Nations has been able to count upon the strong, consistent support of the Security Council, actions under Chapter VI of the Charter, having to do with good offices, fact-finding and impartial third-party mediation, have also become more authoritative and quite effective, particularly in instances like the political settlement brokered by the United Nations in El Salvador and in aspects of the political reconstruction of Cambodia. Overall, the UN's capacities for peacekeeping and peacemaking have been significantly strengthened precisely at the historical moment when there is increased need for such capacities.

Among international agencies that could conceivably perform the peacekeeping/ peacemaking function, the United Nations is best qualified. It is the only political organization with military capability that can claim to represent the entire international community. While there is much that is fictitious about this claim, since UN peacekeeping actually represents a consensus only of the Security Council and more particularly of its five permanent members, allowing the fiction to stand legitimizes UN interventions on grounds that no other agency can claim -- i.e., action in the name of the international community. On these grounds, the UN is a more acceptable intervenor, in non-Western areas especially, than anyone else. Equally, important, over many years the United Nations has accumulated a significant amount of experience at intervening as peacemaker and peacekeeper. This is certainly true with regard to various kinds of armed interventions, of which there have been dozens under UN auspices.<sup>3</sup> What is less well recognized, but highly noteworthy, is that there have also been hundreds of UN interventions as mediator, arbitrator, impartial third-party, conciliator and adjudicator, and considerable valuable experience has accumulated in this realm as well.<sup>4</sup> There has traditionally been a distinguished corps of peacemaking and peacekeeping professionals aiding the Secretary-

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<sup>3</sup>United Nations, *The Blue Helmets: A Review of United Nations Peacekeeping* (New York: The United Nations, 2nd edition, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>K. Venkata Raman (ed.) *Dispute Settlement Through the United Nations* (UNITAR, Dobbs Ferry, NY: Oceana Publications, 1977), *passim*.

General, a group that George Sherry identifies as "the second UN."<sup>5</sup> They are the best in the world at what they do. In recent years particularly, the UN membership has been willing to allow the Organization additional resources to engage in peacekeeping and peacemaking (though these remain woefully inadequate) and the most powerful countries in the world have been willing to allow the UN, via the Security Council, to assume leadership in peacemaking and peacekeeping to an historically unprecedented degree. No other agency has the legitimacy, the expertise, the resources or the mandate for peacemaking and peacekeeping today held by the UN; the world organization remains uniquely positioned to meet international needs.

One important reason why UN peacekeeping has been and can continue to be successful is because it involves activities that are not seriously hampered by the intergovernmental character of the Organization. They are activities that the United Nations, as presently structured, can conduct in a multilateral, political-diplomatic context where all relevant participants are the agents of governments of sovereign states. On peace and security questions, traditionally trained and socialized diplomats, representing foreign ministries, calculating in terms of perceived national interest defined largely as position, power or prestige, are the principal interlocutors. National governments are the primary targets (and beneficiaries) of peacekeeping operations. These operations are facilitated by the structure of power among states, and the major powers, acting in their own self-interests, using the UN, initiate peacekeeping and take and accept responsibility for it. Traditional UN peacekeeping only minimally involves non-governmental organizations or transnational ones, and it requires not even a modicum of supranationality to initiate or execute. It calls up no technical expertise that diplomats or soldiers do not already bring to their professions.

In addition, without understating the significance of the traditional accomplishments of the United Nations in peacekeeping, it should be noted that, in terms of UN policy-making, peacekeeping matters have not been very complex. The traditional mode of UN military intervention is into international conflicts where fighting has already been halted, and where ceasefires or armistices need to be impartially monitored. Here the United Nations typically inserts itself, or, more accurately, the Security Council inserts UN-recruited military forces, between antagonists to deter provocations and insure compliance with hostility-halting agreements.

Notably, most of these situations involve a relatively small number of semi-autonomous participants; most of the communications and involvements of personnel intergovernmental; most of the required

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<sup>5</sup>George L. Sherry, "The United Nations, International Conflict and American Security," *Political Science Quarterly*, 101:5 (1986), pp. 753-771.

national inputs come from single or closely inter-related ministries (e.g., foreign affairs and defense), relatively few UN organs are directly involved, and these are typically among the bureaucratically most efficient ones. Overall, in favorable political contexts, a formal intergovernmental organization like the United Nations should be able to manage the kinds of issues and problems that traditional peacekeeping presents, and, with a very few exceptions, the UN has been quite good at peacekeeping. There is no obvious reason why the UN should not continue to be a most useful instrument for peacekeeping in the traditional mode here described.

But today the challenge confronting the United Nations in promoting peace and security is that many of the conflicts into which it is being injected require mounting operations that do not fit the model of traditional peacekeeping. For one thing, the kinds of situations into which the UN is typically being asked to intervene in the post-Cold War Era fall into operational "grey areas" between traditional impositions to separate warring parties and full-scale military enforcement against aggressors. UN interventions are projections into countries rather than interpositions between them, because small- and large-scale, intercommunal civil wars seem to be emerging as the most frequently recurring threat to world peace. Formally, the international legality of such United Nations interventions remains ambiguous under the United Nations Charter where Chapter I proscribes intervention "in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state," but Chapter VII empowers the Security Council to "determine the existence of any threat to the peace," and "decide what measures should be taken . . . to maintain or restore international peace and security."

In practice, the Security Council has already chosen to broaden the allowable range of UN intervention, and even to define humanitarian crises, as in Somalia, as threats to peace that may entitle the international community to go into countries uninvited. In extreme cases of anarchy, such as Somalia became in 1992 and other African countries could shortly become, the United Nations confronts the problem of having no national government to deal with at all. Along with this come the legalities and practicalities of relating as an intergovernmental international organization to nonsovereign entities of unknown legitimacy, capability, dependability and responsibility. Complicating such situations is the reality that anarchies almost always contain multiple contending entities so that it is rarely possible to find only two sides in conflict. Here it is usually fanciful to try to identify aggressors, and especially difficult to maintain impartiality.

Complicating contemporary UN interventions, and moving them even farther in form from traditional peacekeeping is the fact that many situations nowadays require United Nations entrance while armed

hostilities are ongoing. While the UN typically does not "go in shooting," it more and more frequently "goes in getting shot at." Such interventions therefore are neither armistice monitorings, as in Cyprus, nor combat operations, as during the Gulf War: they are a variety of things in between and they necessitate preparations, deployments and armaments fundamentally different from those of the past. Blue helmets, checklists, checkpoints, white jeeps and inconspicuous, light sidearms will no longer do.

Interventions today are also much more complex than those of the past: they often have humanitarian as well as military dimensions; they require civilian as well as military personnel; and they involve delicate balancings between military measures aimed at halting or deterring hostilities and diplomatic measures aimed at resolving conflicts. The only UN military intervention in the past that approached the present norm of complexity was the Congo Operation, and most agree, by hindsight, that this experience for the UN was disappointing.<sup>6</sup>

If the United Nations is to remain relevant and promising as the international peacekeeper of the early 21st century, important conceptual activities need to be engaged. The new circumstances surrounding UN military interventions, and particularly how they differ from traditional peacekeeping, have to be better understood both by those who would direct the United Nations to intervene, and by those who will implement the directions. Appropriate ends, means and missions have to be mapped for UN action in situations that are neither traditional peacekeeping operations nor enforcement actions against aggressors. Appropriate preparations, including training, earmarked forces and predeployed equipment, have to be conceived and engaged. Arguing that neither the United Nations Secretariat, nor Security Council members have yet seriously undertaken to rethink contingencies and requirements for UN peacekeeping under emergent world conditions, Columbia University's John G. Ruggie admonished in a recent *Foreign Affairs* commentary that the UN's failure to fully understand and doctrinally adjust to the new circumstances surrounding peacekeeping have "brought the world body to the point of outright strategic failure."<sup>7</sup> At first imperative in UN reform, then, is to think through and better conceptualize the Organization's peacekeeping role under political-military conditions prevailing today.

At a more practical level, other UN reformers are today suggesting that the UN needs to be better informed about volatile situations around

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<sup>6</sup>Ernest W. Lefever, *Uncertain Mandate: Politics of the U.N.. Congo Operation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), *passim*. See also, *The Blue Helmets*, *op. cit.*, pp. 215-259.

<sup>7</sup>John Gerard Ruggie, "The U.N.: Wandering in the Void," *Foreign Affairs*, 72:5 (November/December 1993), p. 26.

the world and especially better informed about situations into which the Organization is being asked to intervene. The Secretary-General's access to timely information about brewing trouble needs to be greatly improved. The Secretariat's data-gathering and analysis capabilities need to be improved and more directly linked to the Secretary-General's Office.<sup>8</sup> No matter how strong the opposition from member states, something resembling a UN diplomatic service, with representation and reporting capabilities at permanent missions around the world needs to be established.

The size of the UN professional staff managing peacemaking missions and peacekeeping operations needs to be substantially enlarged. Steps need to be taken to minimize, indeed to eliminate, the *ad hoc* procedures typically followed in the assembling, dispatching and deploying of blue-helmeted military forces. Some appropriately trained and quickly deployable UN forces should be permanently established. Other appropriately trained peacekeeping units should be continually available in the military forces of member states and held ready for UN service. Policies should be formulated that guarantee that UN peacekeepers are appropriately armed for their assigned missions, and rules of engagement should be set down which actually allow the UN to show force when contingencies require.<sup>9</sup> There is considerable, and understandable, concern among member governments about giving the UN its own military forces. But, if the Organization is going to be repeatedly asked to place young men and women in harm's way, the international community must see to it that its peacekeeping interventions are of the highest professional military quality, even if this involves establishing a United Nations army.

Needless to say, the UN's unique capacity for conducting peacekeeping and peacemaking operations in the post-Cold War world depends crucially upon the ability of the members of the Security Council, especially the Permanent Five, to continue to find consensus. For the time being at least, none of the major powers appears interested in fomenting or abetting regional or national conflicts, in letting these escalate, or in intervening unilaterally to control them. Indeed, each of

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<sup>8</sup>Connie Peck, "Preventive Diplomacy: A Perspective for the 1990s," *Occasional Papers Series, Number XIII* (New York: The Ralph Bunche Institute on the United Nations, February 1993), pp. 6-13; George L. Sherry, "The United Nations Reborn: Conflict Control in the Post-Cold War World," *Critical Issues* 90.2 (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1990), p. 27.

<sup>9</sup>Edward C. Luck, "Steps Toward UN Reform," internal memorandum, United Nations Association of the United States, New York, March 19, 1993, p. 4; See also, United States Commission on Improving the Effectiveness of the United Nations, *Defining Purpose: The U.N. and the Health of Nations* (Washington: September, 1993), pp. 20-21.



the major powers appears to favor the emerging multipolar status quo, which not only privileges them in diplomacy and commerce, but allows them respite for attention to domestic affairs. Should the major power consensus breakdown, however, the peacemaking capacity of the United Nations would be greatly diminished and the Organization's peacekeeping capacity would all but vanish. The results would be similar, incidentally, if the UN goes bankrupt: the financing of UN peacekeeping activities, along with the general financing of the organization urgently require top-to-bottom overhaul.<sup>10</sup>

### Development via Diplomacy?

Positively speaking, most of the reforms required to render the United Nations a more effective peacekeeper in the post-Cold War world, are accomplishable. The costs and threats of emergent disorder could very well impel the international community to progressively enhance the UN's peacekeeping capacities in coming years, in the course of which the needed reforms would be set in place. However, as originally conceived and as written into the Charter, the UN was to function not only as peacemaker and peacekeeper, but also as peace-builder. The Organization was supposed to foster and nurture human conditions that contributed to peace by eliminating the scarcities, inequities and injustices that people have been historically prone to fight about. To its credit, the United Nations contributed pivotally to eliminating colonialism and the injustice that this practice both symbolized and perpetrated.<sup>11</sup> But, the Organization over several decades has accomplished precious little toward enhancing the material well-being of the poverty-engulfed peoples of the post-colonial world.

While it is true that the United Nations has been able to mobilize humanitarian assistance in crisis situations, it is nonetheless difficult to find much positive UN influence in the area of *development* however this term is defined. Economic growth accompanied by enhanced human well-being has occurred in recent decades, particularly in Asia and some parts of Latin America. But the reasons for this growth hardly have to do with the UN. It could even be argued that for some countries, like the Republic of China, South Korea and Singapore, economic development followed from pursuing policies that not only shunned UN assistance, but outrightly rejected the prevailing doctrines of the United Nations developers. It would appear therefore that if the UN has comparative programmatic advantage anywhere, this advantage is surely not in the realm of development.

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<sup>10</sup>Independent Advisory Group on U.N. Financing, *Financing an Effective United Nations* (Ford Foundation: New York, 1993), pp. 14-21.

<sup>11</sup>David A. Kay, *The New Nations in the United Nations, 1960-1967* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), *passim*.

Explaining the United Nation's failure as a development institution is involved. Surely, the deeply underlying reason for its unimpressive record is the combination of intellectual arrogance and prevailing ignorance that has plagued Development Economics in particular, and development theorizing in general for forty years.<sup>12</sup> How to promote human betterment via social and economic change, is not very well understood, and policies to promote it have therefore rested on the weakest of intellectual foundations. The UN bought into development theorizing, or "development sloganizing," early on, and recanted, recouped and redirected itself every time a prevailing sloganized theory -- e.g., take-off, import substitution, trade not aid, trickle down, basic human needs, marketization, sustainable development -- was discredited and replaced by a new one. All of the other development agencies did the same, with the same disappointing results.

Beyond intellectual weakness at the foundation, a central theme in explaining the UN's particular shortcomings as a development institution is that the intergovernmental character of the Organization has weighed heavily against its ability to conceptualize, map and lead down pathways toward human material betterment. For one thing, governments politicize issues, even highly technical ones, and international organizations that include cold-warring governments among their members tend to polarize ideologically. This was certainly the case within the United Nations concerning East-West issues during the American-Soviet contest. It has been just as surely the case concerning North-South issues during the colonial-anti-colonial struggles and with all that has followed in their wake. The North-South Cold War continues; indeed it is probably just beginning as a world historic phenomenon and will go on until the contending ideologies are rendered obsolete by material conditions. The contest is about fundamental philosophical differences between the West and the non-West, having to do among other things with differing conceptions of society and individuals' roles.<sup>13</sup> It is also about deeply contrasting interpretations of history, about preferences in political economy, about differing conceptions of justice and about race. It has prevented the United Nations from meaningfully defining "development," from formulating workable strategies to promote it and from mobilizing resources to execute strategies.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>See the symposium issue of *Development* magazine, particularly contributions by Mahbub Ul Haq, Manfred Max-Neef and Maurice Strong. *Development*, 2/3, 1988.

<sup>13</sup>Kishore Mahbubani, "The West and the Rest," *The National Interest*, 28 (Summer, 1992), pp. 3-13.

<sup>14</sup>Majid Rahnema, "Under the Banner of Development," *Development*, 1/2 (1986), pp. 37-46.

As a result, the intergovernmental relations of economic and social development, largely acted out in the UN, have been much more in the nature of debates aimed at fixing blame and scoring rhetorical points rather than about concrete projects and programmes aimed at uplifting destitute people. Though unproductive, the development debate among governments goes on: the industrialized capitalist countries of the North imagine that "development" must mean striving to become like them; the poorer countries of the South insist that "development" must mean striving to rid themselves of dependence on the North so that they need not become like them but might instead preserve their non-Western cultural identities. Within the UN in particular, the North-South debate over development has been largely about controlling the development discourse, which is to say, determining the way development is to be thought about and spoken about, which of course makes all the difference in determining what ought or ought not to be done about it! The main outcome has been that people's actual needs have been ignored by the debating governments, both North and South. "Forty years of 'development' assistance by international institutions, including the United Nations System," Rahnema explains,

have shown that, despite attempts to adapt development theories and practices to the real needs of populations concerned, these institutions seem organically unable --and often unwilling -- to change their . . . approach. Problems are seldom perceived or addressed according to the way the peoples themselves view their needs and aspirations. 'Priorities' and 'strategies' are set independently by planners with their own pre-defined objectives. In reality, they have little to do with the way the people have lived, are living, wish to live.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the ideological barriers that cloud communication among governments and block meaningful cooperation, there are also practical reasons why intergovernmental diplomacy cannot contribute very much to social and economic development. It is not entirely surprising that the diplomacy of development has produced much more in the way of slogans, conferences, committees, studies, reports, resolutions and declarations, than poor people's lives changed for the better. For one thing, the technical sophistication of many development issues usually requires expertise beyond that typically possessed by diplomats, inputs beyond those which foreign ministries can provide, and calculations other than those which normally go into

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

traditional assessments of national interest. It is also sadly the case that any number of governments, in both rich and poor countries, give highest political and economic priority to objectives other than improving the quality of poor people's lives in the non-western world. For these regimes, the rituals of development diplomacy, particularly in the UN, conveniently sham largely fictitious commitments. "The practices and the rituals,"

... constitute the fragile foundations necessary both to maintain the fictions and to serve as useful devices for finding temporary solutions to otherwise basic contradictions. They are guarantees that the U.N.system remains,after all, the club which different Member States want it to be.<sup>16</sup>

Consultative and negotiating processes concerning social and economic development frequently must involve non-governmental and transnational actors who have no formal role in state-to-state diplomacy and no formal status in traditional intergovernmental organizations. Non-governmental organizations, constituted at all levels from local to transnational, are today the custodians of vast stores of experiential wisdom concerning social and economic change in non-Western areas. They are also primary agents of development (if we define it as enhanced human well-being) because they are almost uniquely capable of reaching people whose lives are to be affected by social and economic change.<sup>17</sup> They are also almost uniquely capable of transmitting grassroots conceptualizations and aspirations. Yet, non-governmental organizations remain outside the intergovernmental nexus that generates the development policies and programmes of the United Nations. Both symbolically and often quite literally, they set their tents outside the great meeting halls where the world conferences are held. From there they lobby, criticize, prod and provoke. Some even pray! Governments may listen to NGOs. Some do. But the diplomacy of development is structured in such as way that governments can choose to ignore the NGOs. Many do.

To be sure, in attempting to implement development programmes, the UN must and does deal with non-governmental actors, but it is greatly constrained in so doing because national governments resist. Although logical, and certainly expeditious, it is very difficult (and illegal under the Charter) for the United Nations, in either seeking information or delivering services, to circumvent national governments and deal directly with NGOs in the field. This is particularly true with

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>17</sup>Thomas F. Carroll, *Intermediary NGOS: The Supporting Links in Grassroots Development* (Hartford, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 1992), *passim*.

regard to local NGOs. Governments typically resist relinquishing control over activities taking place within their sovereign jurisdictions, and therefore often look with suspicion upon UN attempts to reach people. Passing through national governments, either from the grassroots upwards or from the United Nations downwards, can be highly frustrating, especially in instances where particular NGOs or their policies and practices are not officially favored by national governments. A considerable amount of UN field activity actually proceeds in circumvention of national governments, but having to go around governments is hardly an efficient way to promote development.

Any number of reform schemes aimed at making the United Nations into a more effective development organization have been suggested. Revamping the Economic and Social Council to render it more of a clearing house for development plans and programmes and more of a UN system-wide coordinator of development undertakings is possible. Creating an official organ in the United Nations system to seat NGOs and thereby make the UN into something more than an intergovernmental organization is interesting. Concentrating UN development activities in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund is plausible. Spinning off development activities to the specialized agencies is also conceivable. Ultimately, however, anything more than a cosmetic, and hence inconsequential, reform of the UN as a development institution necessarily must involve fundamentally altering the intergovernmental character of the Organization. This is more fanciful than feasible.

### **The United Nations and Globalistic Fictions**

Commenting on the deliberative proceedings of one of the UN's specialized agencies, a Geneva-based diplomat interviewed in 1989 remarked that "they think they are making global policies, but none of this has any effect on people." In context his statement referred to the fact that relatively few national governments actually enforce UN policies contained in assumedly universally applicable resolutions. Yet, beyond the issue of political will there is the issue of universality itself. One of things that the UN does, indeed what it has been doing for quite some time, is to make *global* policies. Such policies purportedly speak to conditions and problems facing mankind as a species, or the international community as a social unit, or possibly the international community as a legal entity. But the unities addressed in the UN's global policy-making are mostly fictitious. Humanity is a diverse lot: there is no international "community" by any conventional definition of the term. There are only "communities" -- national communities, religious communities, cultural communities, linguistic communities, economic communities. Much of the mythology of

globalism, and of UN global policy-making, has denied the fragmentation of mankind because globalists aspire to overcome it. Furthermore, much that has come under the rubric of promoting globalism, and accordingly much of the content of UN global policy-making, has been in reality a series of efforts to universalize Western values, practices and institutions.<sup>18</sup>

It is true that five hundred years of European cultural ascendance and political, economic and military dominance, have spread a veneer of westernness over mankind.<sup>19</sup> It is also true that Western governments and peoples have used international organizations like the United Nations to thicken this veneer because it has been much to the western advantage to do so. Hence, international legality is based on Western customs, norms and practices; human rights are Western rights born during Europe's 18th Century Enlightenment and institutionalized as a result of the American and French Revolutions; modernization and the development that leads to it mean becoming socially and economically like the West; democratization means establishing Western-style democracy. "Civilization" means Western civilization which can be attained by abandoning all manner of non-Western barbarisms and backwardness, and the policies of international organizations, insofar as Western powers influence them, should be directed toward suppressing these "uncivilized" conditions.<sup>20</sup>

As we approach the 21st Century, it is beginning to appear as if the outward diffusion of Western civilization may have run its course. Decolonization was the initial political reaction against Western hegemony, but the inevitable cultural reaction was postponed by the ideological conformities demanded during the Cold War. With the end of the Cold War has come the opening phase of non-Western cultural reassertiveness, exhibited in phenomena like Islamic Fundamentalism, Hindu communalism, East Asian authoritarian developmentalism and Chinese cultural self-assuredness.<sup>21</sup> The Russian parliamentary elections of December, 1993 exhibited a pronounced resurfacing of culturally embedded, historically familiar, Westernphobic Russian orientalism. At the Vienna Conference on Human Rights during the summer of 1993, China and the Islamic countries rebutted Western

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<sup>18</sup>Rahnema, *op. cit.*, 38-41.

<sup>19</sup>Theodore H. Von Laue, *The World Revolution of Westernization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 11-50.

<sup>20</sup>Robert W. Cox, "Gramsci, Hegemony and International Relations: An Essay on Method," in *Gramsci, Historical Materialism and International Relations*, Stephen Gill (ed.), (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 58-64; Cox, "Structural Issues of Global Governance: Implications for Europe," in Gill (ed.), pp. 264-276.

<sup>21</sup>Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?" *Foreign Affairs*, 72:3 (Summer, 1993), pp. 22-49.

notions about the universality of its historic principals by insisting upon the cultural relativity of human rights. This exchange between the West and the non-West was serious, and it should be read as a harbinger of many inter-cultural clashes to come. What these coming cultural contests will mean is that neither the West nor the United Nations is going to do very well at trying to preserve the myth of an international community, nor will there be much to be gained by promoting globalism as an ideology because it will ring hollow in the absence of confirming conditions.

Philosophical issues aside, there is also a certain unreality in putting forth global policies to address issues and problems that are best addressed communally. Human rights issues, as noted, might be most productively sorted within cultural communities, as might questions about the appropriateness of particular social and political practices and institutions. There are no agreed universal values and designs about these matters. Why should there be? Issues of development and modernization also might actually be better handled within cultural communities instead according to universal models, standards and attributed aspirations. Why does "modernization" have to mean becoming like the West? Each of the great cultures developed life support algorithms that sustained countless generations. Why cannot "development" and "modernization" mean improving upon these?

For other kinds of issues the most appropriate locus of problem-defining and problem-solving activity, and the most suitable theater for international cooperation is the geographic region. The geography of human settlement being what it is, geographic regions and cultural communities regularly overlap. Most of the most volatile security issues in the post-Cold War world are regional, not global. The danger of a global conflagration is lower today than at any time in the last century and this condition is likely to persist until well into the next century. Today, therefore, the appropriate conflict-resolving (and peacekeeping) forums of first resort ought to be regional international organizations. Logically, United Nations peacemaking and peacekeeping ought to backstop regional efforts. Presently, very few regional organizations actually act as conflict-preventers or conflict-resolvers, and those that occasionally do, like the Organization of African Unity, the Arab League, the Organization of American States, and the newly ambitious Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, have not been very successful. The capacities of these organizations surely should be enhanced.

Environmental problems are also more regional than global, and indeed the worst cases of pollution are national and local. It is no doubt good for the conscience, and certainly good for the media and those who wish to be exposed by them, to hold international conclaves with casts of thousands aimed at protesting the despoiling of the earth. Nor is

there anything wrong with mobilizing commitments to do something about the beleaguered ecosystem. The Rio Conference on the environment was the UN's grandest extravaganza, and its organizers deserve credit for making it happen.

But, how many of mankind's environmental woes are actually global? There are a few such problems to be sure. The greenhouse phenomenon, if indeed there really is one, is everybody's problem with regard to both causes and effects. The same can be said with regard to the hole in the earth's ozone layer. But stopping the browning of the blue Danube is a central European problem, and halting the similar sliming of great rivers around the world are problems for regional riparian neighbors. Cleaning the cesspool that the Mediterranean Sea has become is a problem for the littoral countries; halting the washing of East Africa's topsoil into the Indian Ocean is an East African problem; combating desertification in sub-Saharan Africa is a sub-Saharan African problem; preventing acid rain is a North American and North European problem; freshening polluted air in Mexico City and Beijing are Mexican and Chinese problems respectively; removing the debris floating in Boston's harbor is Boston's problem. The point here is not that those of us not directly affected should ignore these many problems. It is rather that those of us not directly affected cannot do very much about solving most of the problems. Neither can the United Nations at the lofty level of global policy-making do very much. The United Nations can pontificate about perils to the planet Earth, and it can even set down global action plans and establish global goals and standards for environmental purification. It can insist that development must be environmentally "sustainable." But the cooperation required to deal with environmental perils is not global; it is rather regional among affected countries, national among affected communities and local among affected individuals.

There is no need to further belabor the non-globalness of human affairs. What was said about the regional loci of security issues, and the regional and national loci of most environmental problems, could also be said with regard to issues having to do with ethnic and religious minorities, with migration and refugees, food and agriculture, and increasingly even with international trade. Different countries and peoples inhabiting different regions of the planet have different kinds of problems and different ways of solving them. At the level of grand rhetoric much can be cast in generic terms, and regional and local problems can be conceived as variants of global ones. But on the ground, where the problem-solving has to take place, universalistic descriptions and prescriptions tend not to be terribly helpful. During an interview in 1989 dealing with strategies for economic development, a diplomat from Thailand explained what his country was doing to generate capital, but he cautioned against generalizing from the Thai



experience by concluding: "you must remember, Thailand is not Africa!"

To return to relevance in our part of this century and on into the next, the United Nations needs to dispense with myths of universality and abandon the globalistic ideology that drives its policy-making. It needs to institutionalize cultural diversity rather than moving to supersede it. It most assuredly needs to avoid promoting Westernism under the rubrics of development, modernization, human rights and democracy. The United Nations has to be a place where the cultural communities of the world can come together to communicate with and learn from one another; it can no longer be a place where cultural communities come together to homogenize or hegemonize. Ideally, the UN should evolve into a place where ground rules for peaceful inter-cultural relations can be formulated, just as it has been a place where ground rules for peaceful inter-state relations were formulated.

The UN must decentralize, indeed de-globalize. This could very well mean withdrawing completely from problem areas and policy realms where globalistic solutions do not apply. Or, it could mean regionalizing all programmes where diversities render globalistic approaches inept, and devolving considerable autonomy and authority to regional UN institutions and their managers. Better still would be a sweeping effort by governments to regionalize their approaches and in so doing either strengthen existing regional international organizations or establish new ones as needed. In any event, the problem solvers must be brought closer to the problems, or else international cooperation will have an unpromising future.

### **Reforming the United Nations**

We hear so often today that "if the United Nations did not exist, world conditions would demand that it be created." To be sure, the United Nations organization is essential in the post-cold war world. But, were we to create the United Nations today, it is doubtful that we would re-establish the organization that was chartered in 1945, because such an organization would be of limited use under present-day conditions. It is also doubtful that we would actually be able to charter a new world organization today because intensifying West-Non-West differences would foreclose international consensus concerning the structure, mission and functioning of such a body. A new Charter would never emerge. Fortunately, we do not have to create a new world organization for the 1990s and beyond, but we do desperately need to reform the one we have.

The thrust of the arguments in this essay suggests that reforming the UN to make it relevant in the context of contemporary conditions will require substantial changes. The logic of comparative institutional

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advantage recommends that what the UN can do singularly well should be kept in the reformed body as long as the activity in question serves a useful international purpose. But what the UN does poorly or what other agencies can do better should be kept out of the reformed body. What the UN does that is of little use, no matter how well or poorly it does it, should also be kept out.

First, the peacemaking and peacekeeping functions of the United Nations should be retained and emphasized. A UN reformed to fit the contexts of the 1990s and beyond should be primarily a peacemaking and peacekeeping organization. Everything possible therefore should be done to enhance the organization's capacities to act under both Chapter VI and Chapter VII of the Charter. This includes, as recommended above, the establishment of a standing United Nations army, sized and armed to intervene quickly and decisively to quell threats to peace arising from both international and intra-national conflicts. Additional mechanisms should be created to make it possible for the United Nations to cooperate more widely and effectively with regional organizations on matters of peacemaking and peacekeeping. When peace is imperiled in regions, the UN should intervene only after regional agencies have failed or appear likely to fail or when they ask for assistance. If preserving the consensus that makes UN peacemaking and peacekeeping possible requires that the Security Council be restructured to better represent the international distribution of power and influence, then the Security Council should be restructured without delay. At the very least, Japan and Germany should become permanent members of the Security Council, and a way should be found to keep regional powers like India, Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil and Mexico, nearly always on the Council.

Second, the United Nations should exit the development field. The Organization's unimpressive record as a development institution, the constraints of intergovernmentalism, the North-South new cold war context of world politics and the availability of other more promising agents all recommend that the UN should relinquish its development mission. The entire multi-lateral development effort should be decentralized--communalized culturally and regionalized geographically and financially. To the extent possible institutional contexts should be created that avoid North-South or West-Non-West politicization, which means, practically speaking, keeping the West out of development issues and institutions. There are many meanings to development; peoples must be empowered to define it and pursue it as best suits their needs and heritages. Institutional contexts should also be created that better integrate governmental and non-governmental wisdom and action: NGOs should be the moving forces for development.

Third, to the extent that it implies supranational or transcultural community, or aspirations to create such communities, globalism

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should be abandoned as the UN's operating ideology. This is not because globalism is necessarily philosophically flawed, but rather because it is fanciful under prevailing world conditions. Instead of promoting globalism in a world of proliferating diversity, the United Nations might much more usefully take diversity as the great given of our time and promote inter-cultural communication, toleration and learning. Ironically, the only organ of the United Nations system principally dedicated to doing this is UNESCO, and that agency is today in a state of disarray. UNESCO desperately needs to be revitalized.