



The UN



• The United Nations

- According to the UN charter, the UN has four purposes
 - Maintain international peace and security
 - Friendly relations
 - Cooperate to solve problems
 - Humanize the actions of nations
- Same purpose as League of Nations (LoN) so how is UN different?
 - LoN
 - Lack of power
 - No clear division of responsibility
 - UN
 - Clear divisions of authority
 - Power and legitimacy



• UN Security Council (UNSC)

- Primary responsibility: maintaining international peace and security
- 15 members, with 5 permanent, veto wielding members
 - No coincidence who the 5 permanent members are
 - UN: liberal institution; UNSC: realist institution
- Tension between power and ideals defines UN
- Power of UNSC
 - Binding resolutions
 - Chapter VI
 - Chapter VII



• UN General Assembly

- The keeper of international recognition
- Seat of moral authority?
- Largely left out of matters of peace and security

• Secretariat

- UN Bureaucracy
- Secretary General can bring matters before the UNSC
- Role of moral authority, or the bully pulpit theory of politics



• Economic and Social Council

- Plays a major role in the development of international economic system
- Coordinates social and economic work of UN
 - World Health Organization
 - International Labour Organization
 - United Nations Development Program
 - UN Children's Fund
- In many ways, the Economic and Social Council seeks to remedy the problems of inequality generated by the system
- Are these efforts substantial or cosmetic?



• International Court of Justice

- Reflects the liberal ideal of domesticating the international system
- In recognition of sovereignty, participation is voluntary.
 - Once a state participates, decisions are binding
- Tool of the weak?



• Impact of the Cold War

- Political context matters
- Vetoes in Cold War paralyze UNSC
- Modern UN form arose out of compromises forced by Cold War
 - No standing army
 - Peacekeeping

• Peacekeeping

- Limited operational capability
- Respects sovereignty of the conflicting states, does not impose solutions
- Does reflect, however, increasing concern over justice

• Does UN still matter?

- Debates over UN authorization for Iraq war suggest it does
- As do debates by Libyan rebels to ask for UN support
- UN has power outside UNSC
 - World Heritage program
 - UNDP
 - Social and Economic programs
 - UNFCCC and COP
- UN does fail
 - Little autonomous power
 - Bureaucratic politics



MIT OpenCourseWare
<https://ocw.mit.edu/>

17.41 Introduction to International Relations
Spring 2018

For information about citing these materials or our Terms of Use, visit: <https://ocw.mit.edu/terms>.