

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES AND IGO GOALS IN THE POST-WORLD-WAR II PERIOD

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Summary

This topic-level contribution provides a context for discussions of the role of international governmental organizations (IGOs) in the preservation of natural justice, the protection of human rights, and the perceived need to reform the UN system. These are broad multidimensional issues which concern an array of organizations. These issues and decisions made about them by IGOs are for the most part interdependent, as demonstrated by the emergence of “sustainable development” out of the interdependence between the pursuit of development and ecological balance. The term IGO is defined as organizations whose members are representatives of states and are distinguished from organizations which represent governments of cities and provinces. The terms “*nation-state*” and “*international*” relations also require clarification. This article seeks to illuminate the dynamic development of IGOs in the post-World War II period by focusing on the dramatic transformations that have taken place in the UN system of universal membership organizations. It traces the historical roots of the UN system, its achievement of universal membership, and peace tools available for peace building. It defines such fundamental global values as peace, human rights, economic development and ecological balance, and tracks such phenomena as the events which have made multilateral decision-making commonplace, the growing array of

organizations in and the financing of the UN system, and the lessening of the barriers between the people and the UN system.

1. Introduction

This topic-level contribution provides a context for the articles on global issues which follow. They include discussions of the IGO role in the preservation of natural justice, the protection of human rights, and the perceived need to reform the UN system. The broad context is vitally necessary because these are broad issues with a number of dimensions that spread across an array of organizations. It is also required because solutions to problems encountered in different issues are often interdependent, as demonstrated by the emergence of “sustainable development” out of the interdependence between the pursuit of development and ecological balance.

The *Yearbook of International Organizations* has provided an annual tally of the growth of international governmental organizations (IGOs) in the Twentieth Century. The latest edition, 1999/2000, reveals a total of 251 of which seventy-two percent are composed of members from one region. (Table 1) The remaining twenty-eight percent are divided equally, thirty-five each, among organizations with members from more than one continent and those organizations open to members from all regions. One organization, the UN System, is a federation of universal membership IGOs.

<u>Type</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>%IGO</u>
A. Federations of IGOs	1	.39
B. Universal Membership IGOs	35	13.94
C. Intercontinental Membership IGOs	35	13.94
D. Regionally Oriented Membership IGOs	180	71.73
Total	251	100.00

Table 1. Types of International Governmental Organizations (IGOs)

Before going further, it is necessary to define the widely used term IGO. Essentially it means organizations whose members are representatives of states; they could more appropriately be called “inter-state” organizations. This distinction is necessary because there are also many organizations which represent governments of cities and provinces. One example is the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), with headquarters in Brussels. Founded in 1913, it involves representatives of local governments from around the world.

At the same time, an understanding of world politics and the roles of IGOs may be clouded by the use of the terms “*nation-state*” and “*international*” relations. At present most so-called “failed states” are actually multination states with groups of individuals within their territories which do not identify with the state. For example, it could be said that there are extensive international relations among the nations within the Democratic Republic of Congo. At the same time, we may be prevented from perceiving the

realities of world politics by ignoring the existence of multistate nations, such as the Kurds.

In an effort to make our illumination of the dynamic development of IGOs in the post-World War II period manageable, this article will focus on the dramatic transformations that have taken place in the UN system of universal membership organizations. We will approach these developments through these foci:

1. the historical roots of the UN system;
2. the achievement of universal membership;
3. the increasing number of peace tools available for peace building;
4. definition of fundamental global values, such as peace, human rights, development and ecological balance;
5. making multilateral decision-making commonplace;
6. the growing array of organizations in the UN system;
7. financing the UN System; and
8. diminishing the barriers between the people and the UN system.

2. Historical Context

In approaching the transformation in the UN System since the Second World War, it is imperative that it be viewed with a perspective that acknowledges its deep historical roots. The stage on which the drafters of the UN Charter performed was built during a long historical process through which human inquisitiveness, restlessness and acquisitiveness produced ever increasing contacts among human settlements, across ever longer distances. The results of this historical process presented opportunities at the 1945 founding meeting in San Francisco which were the product of the experience of peaceful cooperation among peoples. But there were also constraints produced by tendencies toward wars of increasing geographic scope with weapons of rapidly increasing destructive power.

If we look back in time from San Francisco, we readily see that the UN is a child of the League of Nations. It incorporates important institutional developments of the League, such as an international secretariat and the growth in importance of economic and social activities during its relatively brief history. The UN Charter also reflects experience gained from League failures, for example the procedures for deployment of military forces by the Security Council in response to aggression. The requirement that no permanent member of the Security Council vote against such deployment has, until recently at least, been an overwhelming restraint on the use of this power; it should be noted, however, that the unanimity required in the League was more stringent than the nine votes out of fifteen required in the UN.

The League too was not wholly a product of its founding conference, the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. Inis L. Claude considers the century bounded by the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the outbreak of the First World War (1914) as the “era of preparation for international organization.” He discerns three prime sources of the Leagues of Nations. First, the League Council evolved out of the Concert of Europe created by the Congress of Vienna, convoked to create a new Europe out of the ruins of the

Napoleonic Wars. Through the Concert of Europe the great powers made themselves the self-appointed guardians of the European system of states. The Concert of Europe met sporadically, some 30 times, before the First World War to deal with pressing political issues. While smaller states were sometimes present at Concert meetings, the Concert was dominated by the powerful. The League Covenant provided for a Council with explicit authority, the continuity of regular meetings and the membership of both large and small states.

Second, the League also evolved out of the Hague System, instituted by conferences in 1899 and 1907. The League borrowed extensively from procedures for the peaceful settlement of conflicts codified by the Hague System. And the League reflected its response to growing demands for universality, i.e. that all states take part in international conferences. In the words of the president of the 1907 Hague Conference, “This is the first time that the representatives of all constituted States have been gathered together to discuss interests which they have in common and which contemplate the good of mankind.” The notion of universality meant not only the inclusion of smaller states but also participation by states outside Europe.

Third, the League also evolved out of international bodies founded in the nineteenth century, often referred to as public international unions, to deal with common problems that transcend state boundaries. These include the Central Commission for Rhine Navigation, established in 1831, and the Danube Navigation Commission, established in 1856. Other examples are the International Telegraphic Union (1865), the Universal Postal Union (1874), and similar organizations dealing with health, agriculture, tariffs, railroads, standards of weight and measurement, patents and copyrights, narcotic drugs and prison conditions. Through these organizations states acknowledged that problems were emerging that required periodic conferences where collaborative decisions would be made, to be implemented by secretariats on a day-to-day basis. The League borrowed extensively from this practice.

If we probe deeper into the past we find, of course, that the forces that fostered the antecedents of the League also had more distant beginnings. It is important to take note of these because we sometimes tend to forget them when we emphasize more recent forms of “interdependence” and “globalization.” The Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century dramatically changed the technology of transportation, communication and manufacturing. This in turn fostered the need for international organizations to deal with problems created by more rapid transportation and communication and by growth in international marketing, in importing of raw materials and in the international interdependence of labor.

Some might say that humanity was placed on an irreversible path toward the League and the United Nations even earlier, in the late fifteenth century, when Europeans began a pattern of worldwide exploration that eventually led to extensive empires in Africa, Asia, and Latin America and to Western domination of the world. William McNeill dates the “closure of global ecumene” as 1500–1650. The result was to link the Atlantic face of Europe with the shores of most of the earth.

European-based Empires eventually led to the creation of a worldwide system of dependent territories. Efforts to transform these colonial empires have been prominent on the agendas of the UN System ever since its creation. In its first twenty-five years the United Nations was deeply involved in the creation of independent states out of former colonial empires. This was followed by efforts of these new states to transcend their economic dependence on their former colonial rulers. In a fundamental sense the conditions that fomented “Third World” demands for a New International Economic Order in the 1970s, and for a New International Information and Communications Order in the 1980s, have their roots in the “closure of global ecumene” in 1500–1650. At the same time, the “failed states” in which the UN has intervened in the Post Cold-War era have often been states whose arbitrary borders—disregarding the political and cultural identities of local peoples—were dictated by colonial rulers.

3. Achievement of Universality

The universality of United Nations membership now seems so ordinary that its significance is often overlooked. At its founding the League had only 29 members, including 10 from Europe, 10 from Latin America, and only nine from all the rest of the world. The hope of League founders that League membership would be universal was never realized. Although 63 states were eventually members of the League, there were never more than 58 members at one time. The UN has grown from 51 members to 189 members since its founding. Switzerland has chosen to remain outside the UN, although it does maintain an Observer Mission in New York and is a member of many specialized agencies.

Those who worked for universality in the League of Nations would be stunned were they to wander into the UN General Assembly and see an Assembly of 189 members. The same would be true of founders of the UN. If we very arbitrarily assign these states to five customary regions, there are now 53 from Africa, 42 from Asia, 44 from Europe, 35 from the Americas, and 11 from Oceania. Of course, elements of the old Concert notion of rule by the powerful still remain—in the Security Council, in superpower negotiations outside the UN, and in a variety of economic and financial bodies within and outside the UN. Nevertheless, significant progress toward universal participation has been made.

Appreciation of the significance of universality is enhanced by recognizing that only a few states have embassies in virtually all other states. Most states only have embassies in the large and most powerful states, in states in their region, and in a few others. It is common practice for a single embassy to be accredited to a number of states. Thus the achievement of UN universality has had a fundamental impact on possibilities for bilateral, as well as multilateral contact. And it is an indispensable prerequisite for global problem-solving. States who would erode the principle of universality, either by withdrawing from UN organizations, or by denying membership to others, are threatening one of the most precious achievements of the last 75 years. The opportunity for all states to speak to all others, and the obligation of all others to listen, is now widely accepted as a fundamental principle of the common law of humanity.

Imagine how surprised the founders of the League, or the United Nations, would be to learn what has emerged from their initiatives. Imagine, too, how much easier their task would have been had they been able to approach the future with these achievements already in place. This thought will set the stage on which we will now consider each element in the heritage which we have received from the “era of *preparation* for global governance.” The “era of *competent* global governance” is still in the future, but we have come much further than most people realize. The greatest danger which we face in the near future is that we may become so incapacitated by dwelling on how far we have to go that we will fail to move forward on the solid stepping stones which have been laid by those who have gone before.

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Biographical Sketch

Professor Chadwick Alger is the Mershon Professor of Political Science and Public Policy Emeritus, The Ohio State University. He holds the BA from Ursinus College, an MA from the School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University, and a Ph.D. from Princeton University. He has been President of International Studies Association (1978–1979), Secretary General of International Peace Research Association (1983–1987) and has published widely on the United Nations System, including *The United Nations System: Potential for the Twenty-first Century*, 1998 and has also published widely on the involvement of local people, organizations and governments in world relations.