

Review – The New United Nations

Written by Martin Duffy

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MARTIN DUFFY, FEB 24 2024

The New United Nations: International Organization in the Twenty-First Century (3rd Edition)
By John Allphin Moore, Jr. and Jerry Pubantz
Routledge, 2023

Scholars and students of IR will welcome the publication of the third edition of this successful text. Substantially updated, the horizontal themes are the UN's challenges in global governance, nation-building, and human development. Uppermost among these are unresolved conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, and Europe; and the scourges of disease, climate change, and the risks inherent in the retreat from multilateralism. Fully explaining the UN's place amidst these challenges, the novel features of this new edition include the following:

- Updated chapters and a new Introduction, including discussion of the Paris Climate Change Agreement, the world's response to COVID-19, and the revival of ultranationalism and great-power rivalry.
- New sections on the theory and practice of neoliberalism and populism, the UN's use of the "Responsibility to Protect" in the Middle East, the Arab Spring, and multifaceted roles in the developing world, especially in Africa.
- Updated analysis of twenty-first-century challenges to collective security, such as Syria and Ukraine.
- A special section on student Model United Nations experience.
- Coverage of the UN's efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Extensive e-Resources.

To do justice to the breadth of this new edition, this review will offer a cook's tour, chapter by chapter. The book is divided into a conceptual introduction, eight solid chapters and a thematic epilogue. It starts with the 'good news' story of the Paris Agreement on climate change. Against this it juxtaposes the pressure-points shown by COVID-19, human rights violations, intrastate conflicts, and threats to the UN's own legitimacy in the liberal international order. Refreshingly, it concludes that despite threats to its viability, the UN enormously exceeded the envisioned breadth of the organization as conceived by its founders, most notably in its steps to protect 'individual rights'.

Chapter 1 (Ways of Thinking about the United Nations and International Organizations) will excite the IR specialist, with its consideration of the organization in the context of the primary IR theories of realism and idealism. Against this, the authors consider the influences of neo-conservatism and neo-liberalism, Marxism, feminism, constructivism, and post-modernism; populism, nativist and nationalist movements. This is a substantial improvement on previous editions as it places the UN right at the centre of theoretical debate about IR.

Chapter 2 (Origins and History of the United Nations) re-traces the steps taken to create collective security, and how the UN possesses greater prowess than its predecessor, the League. Implementing "Eleanor's UN," responding to the humanitarian aspirations of the President's wife, the UN quickly encountered a Cold War. Twenty-first century fissures, including unilateral military intervention in Iraq by the United States and Russia's muscular military action-inherently threatened the principle of collective security.

Chapter 3 (The Evolving UN Charter) shows how the UN encapsulates protection of human rights, environment, and disarmament. Cleverly, the authors explain that while "Peacekeeping" (perhaps the actions most synonymous with

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the UN) is not mentioned in the Charter- by utilizing Chapter VI (pacific settlement of disputes) and Chapter VII (Security Council actions) the UN crafted a “Chapter VI½” authorization for peacekeeping operations.

Chapter 4 (Evolving Institutions) elucidates the purposes of the array of UN specialized agencies, including global financial and trade entities. Particular emphasis is placed on two newer organizations that highlight the ongoing evolution of the UN: the Human Rights Council, dating from 2006, and the Peacebuilding Commission, an advisory body established in 2005. The UN previously designed the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (becoming the World Trade Organization in 1995). The clear conclusion is that not only has the UN Charter evolved, but along with it, the various UN institutions—including the six principal organs of the United Nations. Succinctly we learn how much we have departed from the world of the Bretton Woods Conference.

Chapter 5 (Maintenance of International Peace and Security) retraces the UN’s founding principle of collective security. UN efforts to maintain peace during the past seventy-five years have widened the meaning of collective security to include “preventive” diplomacy and the responsibility to protect civilians from egregious violations by their own governments. The means used by the UN in the name of collective security have evolved to include “smart” sanctions, peacekeeping, state-building, and authorization of selected member states or coalitions to act in the name of all (subcontracting).

Chapter 6 (Peacekeeping and Nation-Building) addresses the UN’s evolution in response to ethnic and religious civil conflict, as peacekeeping missions have escalated in number and expanded their mandates. At its zenith in 2015, nearly 133,000 peacekeepers were serving in sixteen missions, mostly in Africa and the Middle East. A “second generation” of peacekeeping emerged in the 1990s as the world put greater reliance on the UN to address domestic upheavals. Democratic nation-building became the new *modus operandi*. Peacekeepers now protect refugees, deliveries of humanitarian aid, investigate and seek to prevent human rights violations, convene constitutional assemblies, monitor elections, demobilize warring groups, and provide humanitarian workers.

Chapter 7 (Making Global Public Policy, Promoting Civil Society, Human Rights, and Women) sketches the UN’s emergent task to protect human rights and to generally better the lives of people. During the past three-quarters of a century, the effort to respond to thematic issues relevant to individuals’ lives has spawned a central policy-making role- separate from the immediate causes of peace and war, and into a complex relationship with non-state actors of all types. It has been central to the judicial and legal definition; and enforcement of the world’s conception of human rights. It has also mobilized public opinion on behalf of an international women’s agenda. In this work, the UN’s engagement with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in global policy-making is yet another indicator that the organization has become a transnational body. By 2022, more than 4,000 NGOs were working closely with the organization and its specialized agencies. For younger people, NGOs like the National Model United Nations introduce the global policy process and skills of international diplomacy.

Chapter 8 (Economic Development, the Environment, and Health Policy) delineates the remarkable extent to which the UN is actively engaged in pursuing development policy, and examining and addressing economic, environmental, and health issues affecting the world. Its efforts were buffeted by East-West struggles during the Cold War and criticisms from the developing world, whose leaders sought a New International Economic Order. Despite the challenges, through many types of multilateral forums—the UN wedded environmental concerns to the search for economic progress in the developing world, producing a new conception of economic development as “sustainable” development, leading to member states achieving consensus in 2015 on seventeen sustainable goals. Beginning with the Earth Summit in 1992 and its promulgation of Agenda 21 and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the UN has been the primary initiator of the diplomatic effort that achieved the Paris Agreement on global warming and conventions on desertification and biodiversity. In the search for sustainable human development, the UN has also addressed (through its specialized agencies) particularly the World Health Organization, the health crises of the twenty-first century, including Ebola and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The final section (Epilogue) suggests that the UN as an international intergovernmental organization, resembles more a “confederacy” than a “unitary” or “federal” government, which are the most familiar forms of sovereign nation-

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state polities. Consequently, the UN's ability to enforce its decisions is contingent on the actions of its members. In East Timor and Liberia, the UN intervention eventually brought peace and a democratic elections to impoverished, distraught nations. In fact, the UN also served as the epicentre of the international legal response to the Ukrainian war, partly because Ukrainian leaders, and their various supporters, decided to rely on the UN Charter, international legal institutions, and the major organs of the Security Council and the General Assembly, as the crisis unfolded.

This third edition of what is now a staple of the IR curriculum on international organisations, is to be welcomed – not just for its substantial updating of a comprehensive, assessable analysis of the UN, but also because of its many novel features. The new sections on the theory and practice of neo-liberalism and populism, the UN's use of the "Responsibility to Protect" in the Middle East, the Arab Spring, and multifaceted roles in the developing world, are invaluable. The updated analysis of twenty-first-century challenges to collective security, including Syria and Ukraine, and a special section on the student Model United Nations are both excellent.

Finally, the detailed coverage of the UN's efforts to implement the Sustainable Development Goals, and new e-Resources signposted by this volume, will greatly assist the IR community. Naturally one might consider what are the book's weaknesses? Most likely these might be readily forgiven, for while the authors may have occasionally elaborated in greater detail on some parts of a complex narrative, they have amply succeeded in taking a fresh and fulsome look at a most complex organization.

About the author:

Martin Duffy has participated in more than two hundred international election and human rights assignments since beginning his career in Africa and Asia in the 1980s. He has served with a wide range of international organizations and has frequently been decorated for field service, among them UN (United Nations) Peacekeeping Citations and the Badge of Honour of the International Red Cross Movement. He has also held several academic positions in Ireland, UK, USA and elsewhere. He is a proponent of experiential learning. He holds awards from Dublin, Oxford, Harvard, and several other institutions including the Diploma in International Relations at the University of Cambridge.