

International Organisations and Development

The United Nations Lesson V

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Origins

- The UN was negotiated while WWII was still being fought with the idea in the mind of Allied forces of defeating the enemy.
- The UN Charter was adopted in 1945 and had 51 member states, membership is now over 190 representing almost all of the world states.
- Its main aims: maintaining international peace and security, protecting human rights, delivering humanitarian aid, peacemaking and peacebuilding, promoting sustainable development and upholding international law.
- Political realism at work: the Powers that saved the world from the Axis Powers should have prime responsibility for world government and war avoidance.
- Strategy: carrying over wartime Great Power cooperation into peacetime with a Council which would hold prime responsibility for the maintenance of peace and security.
- The UN Secretary General was recognised as a purely bureaucratic figure to carry out administrative duties (over time, it has evolved into a dual role of an administrator and a diplomat and mediator addressing disputes between member states).
- Avoid the same mistakes affecting the League of Nations, especially confusion of responsibility for peace and security between Council and Assembly (and veto power of all member states).

Structure: An intergovernmental Organisation

- The UN system is based on five principal organs plus several agencies:
- the General Assembly,
- the Security Council,
- the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
- the International Court of Justice
- the UN Secretariat
- several specialised agencies (IMF, UNESCO, FAO, UNHCR etc.) some of which were created before UN and then included in the UN system
 - all are independent legal entities but they cooperate with UN (mainly through ECOSOC)
 - with a few exception (e.g. ILO that is transnational) they are IGOs

The Main Decision-making Body of UN: The Security Council

- A creation of the power wartime cooperation (though it was recognised that non-permanent members chosen from the lesser powers should also be included).
- It is made up of fifteen member states, consisting of five permanent members—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States—and ten non-permanent members elected for two-year terms by the General Assembly.
- The five permanent members hold veto power over UN resolutions, allowing a permanent member to block adoption of a resolution.
- Its working heavily influenced by the changing configurations and distributions of power, and by the attitudes of its members.
- It mirrors the world power structure of the given period (Cold War, US hegemony, multi-lateralism etc.).
- While other organs of the UN can only make recommendations to member states, the Security Council has the power to make binding decisions (Resolutions) that member states have to carry out.
 - It is the only UN body that can issue potentially binding resolutions (especially under Chapter II –Actions against aggression or threat to peace), while other UN bodies can issue resolutions that are only recommendations.