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THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY (DILEMMAS IN WORLD POLITICS)

Reviewed By Omar Antonio Anduaga Bocanegra *

KAREN A. MINGST, MARGARET P. KARNS & ALYNNA J. LYON, *THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY (DILEMMAS IN WORLD POLITICS)* (5th ed. 2016), Westview Press; ISBN: 9780813350486; 360 pp. (hardcover).

THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY¹ is an inviting book with a multidisciplinary approach, illustrating the the history of the United Nations since its inception. Its chapters contain historical, legal, and statistical knowledge supported by interesting analysis from an International Relations perspective, while also presenting erudite and relevant information that exposes the U.N. from the inside out.² It is rare to find a book that provides such an in-depth interdisciplinary focus, making it a good source of information for multiple fields of study. By using information and analysis transverse to the interest of different audiences, this book leads the reader to approach the study of the U.N. from the widest possible perspective.³

This edition of *The United Nations in the 21st Century* discusses: issues of inclusiveness and the challenges of diversity,⁴ cultural practices,⁵ and climate-change related advances since Paris 2015;⁶ China's role in the world;⁷ and different levels of equality-related affairs added to the issues they have analyzed since the previous book. Rather than just praise the U.N. and highlight its accomplishments, the goal of this book is to help the reader understand the past successes and failures of the U.N., acknowledge its present status, and be able to predict solutions (theoretical or practical) to its future challenges.

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1. KAREN A. MINGST, MARGARET P. KARNS & ALYNNA J. LYON, *THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY* (5th ed. 2016). [hereinafter MINGST, KARNS & LYON].

2. *See generally* MINGST, KARNS & LYON, *supra* note 1.

3. *See id.*

4. *See id.* 191–327.

5. *See id.* at 201–43.

6. *See id.* at 46–60.

7. MINGST, KARNS & LYON, *supra* note 1, at 68–95.

To support its contents and improve reader understanding, this book provides outside resources such as charts, statistical data, photos, and diagrams.⁸ Unlike an encyclopedia summarizing widely known facts, this book delves deep into the analysis and comments within provided resources, including them as part of the reading, not just as a footnote. For someone unfamiliar with the big organogram of the U.N., this is a great source of information to understand the organization as a whole. For those already familiar with the principles this unique institution is based on, the book begins with refreshing reference material, and then provides a starting point of reflection of how the organizations principles operate, and the reforms the U.N. should consider in order to successfully face future challenges.⁹

This is where Mingst, Karns, and Lyon show the value of their work. While ending their introduction on a hopeful, open-ended note, they do not shy from identifying areas where the U.N. needs to work harder, and those in which it has failed.¹⁰ This gives the reader the opportunity to formulate their own opinion: either agreeing with the hope Mingst, Karns, and Lyon present, or fearing the unknown to come. The principle discussion relating to the future of the U.N. is centered around the issue of its capacity to survive in the face of changing times, such as the rise of new global actors, and the political waves that give shape to the world of International Relations.¹¹

The book is organized into chapters that analyze the different and most relevant organisms in the family of the U.N. This provides an understanding of not only the most media-covered works and work groups inside the United Nations, but also issues relevant to other faces used by this institution in its international work. It starts by highlighting the actors responsible for giving shape to the day-by-day of the U.N.¹² It continues addressing the challenges and problems that peacekeeping,¹³ economy, sustainability, human rights, and human security organisms face in their contribution to this organization. It also discusses the role they should ideally play to foster the goal of survivorship. The conclusions to each chapter attempt to address the very real problem of the need for reformation, which is countered by the political and legal limitations of the U.N.'s ability to change. The U.N. is officially made of sovereign states, and states have their own aspirations and motivations, playing a big deal in the ability and pace of institutions like the U.N. to change.¹⁴

As a transversal theme of this structure, the authors cover four different dilemmas that the United Nation will face in the 21st century: (1) expanding needs for governance versus the U.N.'s limited capacity, (2) sovereignty and challenges to sovereignty, (3) the need for leadership and, (4) the need for inclusiveness.¹⁵ In

8. See, e.g. *id.* at 4, 31, 34, 39, 55.

9. See *id.* at 20–36, 281–90.

10. See *id.* at 286–89.

11. See *id.* at 281–86.

12. See MINGST, KARNs & LYON *supra* note 1, at 68–95.

13. See generally *id.*

14. See *id.* at 200.

15. See generally *id.*

each chapter, the dilemmas presented lead the topic of discussion and serve as questions the authors aim to answer. This book, unlike many others, not only tries to identify problems, but after its analysis, attempts to provide answers or solutions, giving a final touch of concreteness that readers sometimes miss when reading strictly informational texts.

However, the dilemmas themselves, without background, do not provide the reader with enough information to understand the core issues faced by the U.N. To this end, the authors first propose a historical starting point for the reader to understand these dilemmas, in a very concise, though illustrative way, providing a literary timeline from the Peace Conferences sponsored by the Russian Tsar, the story of the not always well-understood League of Nations, arriving to the U.N. as we know it today.¹⁶

The first topic would likely be most fascinating to someone with an International Relations background, as it is mixed with a significant amount of historical perspective. If the role of a political analyst is to predict the outcome of certain policies and strategies used in the present based in the findings of the past, the authors provide a good source of elements for future analysts to provide their predictions. This is also a good example of the interdisciplinary approach the book takes, one of its most unique and valuable qualities. The understanding of new actors from the perspective of classic Realism and Liberalism, and the changes and transition of their theories to a more combined Neo approach, lead us to comprehend more about the inclusion of new states, coalitions and no-state actors in the life of the U.N., and further fosters the attention of the reader to think on future reforms based on the need (or not) to include new actors in the nowadays very diverse political map.

In terms of peacekeeping, the main goal is to create ways to prevent wars – as it has been since the Concert of Europe. The book analyzes the U.N.'s effort to face the changes in the concepts of security and the nature of war. The discussion provides great elements of analysis from the prism of the classical Realism, Liberalism, Constructivism, and Feminism in the light of motivations to go to war, the role of Diplomacy, and other alternatives solve international disputes on the U.N. goals to achieve maintenance of peace and security in the world.¹⁷ It is interesting to read the inclusion of concepts like preventive diplomacy, collective security, arms control, and the different threats of the world nowadays like terrorism with an increased attention to sanctions, and protection of civilians. This presentation is later supplemented with a discussion about the limits and capacity of the U.N. peacekeeping operations and the real extent of their impact, with illustrations of cases like Rwanda, Darfur, and the perspectives on Syria.

On the economic, development and sustainability side, the discussion provides good elements of understanding the constant changes in economic relations and the concept of development within the phenomena of globalization. The new idea of human development as a holistic method of addressing human

16. *Id.* at 19–60.

17. *See id.* at 97–245.

well-being and poverty alleviation is addressed from different approaches like technical assistance, the role of regional commissions, and information gathering. Inevitably, this chapter also focuses on the great role that trade-oriented institutions within the U.N. play in the global political arena. Starting with the Bretton Woods institutions, continuing with the GATT rounds, and finally, discussing the role of the World Trade Organization, which brings uniformity to the regulation of trade, although not formally related to the U.N. Finally, this chapter frames the influence of economic liberalism and its relevance within the Millennium Development Goals which in reality integrate the activities of the whole U.N. system.¹⁸

The issue of Human Rights is one a reader would naturally assume to find while exploring a text on the future possibilities of the U.N. This topic, while most important since the end of World War II, is also very controversial in world politics, and very much influences the internal politics and direction of the governments of States part of the U.N. and members of regional organizations. Major importance is given to the role of the General Assembly, Security Council, Human Rights Commission, and the I.C.J. addressing threats to Human Rights, peace and security. However, the challenge proposed in this book is that of finding a balance between, on the one hand, just creating new rules to protect Human Rights, and, on the other hand, being able to monitor and further promote the rights. The authors presented examples of Apartheid; genocides as in Bosnia, Rwanda, Yugoslavia, or Sierra Leone; and human trafficking in the light of the Role of U.N. International Criminal Tribunals and Court.¹⁹

Naturally following these topics, the authors include an interesting discussion on the challenges the U.N. is facing in terms of three key topics in any top-level governmental discussion: The environment, health, and migration. These topics have completely changed the traditional way of addressing international relations, and they are supra-national threats and challenges that need to be addressed in a collective way. This has led to the notion of an expanded view of traditional security, because their impact reaches the international community as a whole. The concept of sustainable development, drafted and supplemented in the different rounds of discussion which lead to the 2015 Paris Conference, is also analyzed. The author(s) provide a central highlight of the U.N.'s work and its challenges to arrive to the initiatives nowadays, in the same way as its response to health issues and crisis management of illness spread. Finally, the authors also address the current problems the world faces in terms of human security, with special reference to the refugee and migration crisis, which is an actual discussion in national and international politics, is discussed within the framework of extreme poverty, disparity, human insecurity and the problem of weak states.

The final chapter of this book is effective at addressing how the U.N. can keep making a difference in the lives of people through its international work.²⁰ The lessons presented in its more than 70 years of existence had an impact, but the

18. MINGST, KARNS & LYON, *supra* note 1, at 159-94.

19. *Id.* at 197-243.

20. *See id.* at 281-90.

question is how much this institution has learned from them, and how much it is willing (or can) do to apply them in its future work.²¹ The necessity of reform is well known by every reader, even by those who are not more familiar with the U.N. than just hearing from it on television. The question is, how much of this reform can be done, and how much will, or power, do Members States and the U.N. have to make reform feasible.

Finally, the question of the need, or the convenience, of a U.N. global governance is open for discussion in the reader's mind, after learning of the history, achievements, fails, and challenges the U.N. has to face in the 21st century weighting it against the non too uncommon idea to be better off without it. By now, thanks to this book, the reader will have more objective knowledge to prepare a better-informed answer to that ultimate question.

21. *See id.*



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