

Lecture No: (9)

International Organization

Because there is no world government, or world empire, international organizations (IOs) have been established by states to help address international problems. But, because these organizations have struggled to address those problems, they have themselves become problems.

Understanding the many organs and offices of IOs, becoming familiar with their web of acronyms, starting with the United Nations (UN), is a basic point of knowledge for the student of IR. The main questions raised by students of IOs are about the possible and necessary reform of IOs, and the precise nature of their social relations; whether they are sites of social forces, or whether they are social forms in their own right. Are IOs pawns of the great powers? Or, with time, luck, and leadership, can the pawns become queens?

Many of the early IOs were established to manage menial international problems, basic infrastructures of international trade and communication.

The Central Commission for Navigation on the Rhine (CCNR), for

instance, is the oldest established in 1815 to maintain the navigability of the Rhine for trade. The second and third oldest, are the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the Universal Postal Union (UPU), established to manage lines of international communication. Today, there are thousands of such organizations successfully managing vast amounts of the daily business of international regulations and activity that most of us take for granted. Yet, IOs have been less effective with managing the big and important problems, war and peace, development and climate change, in particular. **After** the First World War, the League of Nations, the predecessor to the UN, was established for the purposes of maintaining world peace. The academic study of IR, by the way, was established at this same time with the aim of training people able to run this organization, people committed to peace, people who embodied the internationalist spirit of making the world a better place, and people with the linguistic and worldly knowledge needed to do so. To contribute to the spirit and project of peace, the League was provided offices in Geneva, Switzerland, longtime neutral territory unlikely to itself become

the site of warfare. The main organs of the League were the General Assembly of all member states, the Council composed of great powers acting as quasi-executive board, and the Secretariat. The Secretariat was a civil service body of experts and professionals tasked with administering and regulating a vast number of international functions, international economics and finance, disarmament, travel, minority rights, the mandates, health, amongst international intellectual cooperation, amongst other matters. The big and important function of the League was world peace. Collective security was the main mechanism by which world peace was to be maintained by the League. This was the principle that the insecurity of any member state, represented the insecurity of the international community as a whole. As such, security was meant to be collectively pursued and enforced. Yet, the failure of the US to participate, and the withdrawals and deviations of Germany, Japan, and Italy effectively paralyzed the League. Was the League necessarily doomed to failure? Could it have worked in other circumstances? Did it need another design? Were its participants not up to the task?

In 1945, the United Nations was established to replace the failure of the League. It mirrored the League in many ways, but was made with amendments. With a gesture towards US participation, the UN was given offices in New York. The Council received additional authority when reformed as the Security Council, becoming specially tasked E-International Relations ISSN 2053-8626 Page 6/12 Student Feature –

with maintaining peace and security. This effectively abandoned the mechanism of collective security for something closer to a concert of great powers, where the great powers need to work together to maintain peace for the system in general. The failure of this new mechanism was that the great powers were oftentimes at loggerheads, particularly during the Cold War, thus sidelining international organization again. The United Nations organs have also performed poorly on the additional agenda items of development and climate change. Although the goals have been identified through the UN with the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development, these goals are going unmet because the

member states have not carried them through. In many respects, international organization cannot achieve its functions if the international community does not allow it to do so. Thus the problem of international organization, the problem of making it effective in addressing big and important international problems, again, returns to the questions: Is it doomed to failure? Can it work under different circumstances? Can reform of the United Nations amend its limitations?