The “Third” United Nations

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Analysts usually identify two United Nations, one composed of member states and a second composed of the secretariats. A third UN should also be recognized, composed of actors that are closely associated with the world organization but not formally part of it. This “outside-insider” UN includes nongovernmental organizations, academics, consultants, experts, independent commissions, and other groups of individuals. These informal networks often help to effect shifts in ideas, policies, priorities, and practices that are initially seen as undesirable or problematic by governments and international secretariats. KEYWORDS: United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, intellectual history, networks, international secretariats.

Research and oral histories from the United Nations Intellectual History Project (UNIHP) demonstrate that ideas, one of the UN’s most important legacies, have made a substantial contribution to international society. This work also suggests that the concept of a “third UN” should be added to our analytical toolkit in order to move beyond Inis Claude’s classic twofold distinction between the world organization as an intergovernmental arena and as a secretariat.

This “additional” UN consists of certain nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), external experts, scholars, consultants, and committed citizens who work closely with the UN’s intergovernmental machinery and secretariats. The third UN’s roles include advocacy, research, policy analysis, and idea mongering. Its elements often combine forces to put forward new information and ideas, push for new policies, and mobilize public opinion around UN deliberations and operations. Critics might disagree and regard our perspective as quite orthodox. However, in our view, informed scholars, practitioners, and activists have a value-added and comparative advantage within intergovernmental contexts to push intellectual and policy envelopes. These circles—a third UN—are independent of and provide essential inputs into the other two UNs. Such “outside-insiders” are an integral part of today’s United Nations. What once seemed marginal for international relations now is central to multilateralism.

We begin by situating the notion of a third UN among broader scholarly efforts to reconceptualize multilateralism before briefly examining Claude’s two traditional components. We then consider the contributions of the third UN concept by exploring key definitional questions and parsing its...
membership and interactive dynamics in the world organization. Finally, we spell out why the idea of a third UN is significant for the theory and practice of international organization and propose an agenda for future research.

New Multilateralisms and Public Policy Networks
The notion of a three-faceted UN is a contribution to the challenge of theorizing contemporary global governance. It builds on a growing body of work that calls for a conception of “multiple multilateralisms.”

Why bring forward this idea now? After all, networks of diplomats and professionals are hardly new. Although major governments have resisted the influence of nonstate actors and, particularly, civil society organizations, parts of the UN system have long engaged them and drawn on academic expertise located outside the system. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has incorporated representatives of trade unions and the business sector into its tripartite structure since 1919. NGOs have been significant for advances in ideas, norms, and policies at the UN beginning with advocacy for the inclusion of human rights in the UN Charter in 1945 and for the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights three years later. The United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) has long had close interactions with civil society groups for a wide range of children’s issues and for fund-raising and advocacy. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) have interacted with national committees consisting of academics and NGOs. Indeed, most parts of the UN have drawn on academic or professional expertise located outside the system.

A growing number of authors have attempted to conceptualize the phenomenon of nonstate actors, especially NGOs, as they intersect with the United Nations. The number of nonofficial groups involved has grown dramatically, while the density of globalization has meant that communications and technological developments have increased the reach of their voices as well as their decibel levels.

Adopting the notion of the third UN is a sharper way to depict interactions in and around the world organization than employing the usual threefold vocabulary of state, market, and civil society. This terminology resonates for students of international organization who were raised on Claude’s framework, including much of the Global Governance readership. Moreover, beyond the United Nations there could also be a third European Union (EU), a third Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and so on. However, the data and argument presented here relate more specifically to the UN.

Why have analysts relatively neglected—or often resisted addressing—something that seems so obvious? Part of the answer lies in difficult
definitional questions about an amorphous, fluid, and ill-defined group of actors who engage with the United Nations at various levels, at various times, and on various issues. Patterns are hard to grasp, and many of the interactions are ad hoc. Which groups should be included? Should one examine all NGOs and all academics? Where does one draw the line? Would it make more sense to focus on policy orientations rather than on sectors of actors? Once in, are actors forever part of the third UN, or do they move in and out depending on the issue, their influence, or the calendar? This article is another step in conceptualizing global governance in terms of free-flowing networks rather than rigid formal structures.

Most social scientists—development economists, students of comparative politics, sociologists, and anthropologists—have long recognized the empirical and theoretical importance of nonstate actors. However, this insight largely eluded international relations (IR) specialists who, with their preoccupation with issues of sovereignty and with the UN’s being composed of member states, tended to minimize or even ignore interactions with nonstate actors and their influence on decisionmaking. Beginning in the 1970s with Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, the growing presence and activities of actors other than states have gradually forced many mainstream IR theorists to pry open the lid on the black box of state-centric theories of international organization. Realists remain unreconstructed in this regard. But with issues as varied as gender and climate change moving into the limelight on the international agenda, largely as a result of efforts by nonstate actors, and despite the recalcitrance of many states and international civil servants, it is imperative to better understand the impact of the third UN.

The First and the Second UN

Unsurprisingly, the first UN and the second UN have long provided the principal grist for analytical mills about the world organization. After all, member states—51 in June 1945 and 192 today—establish the priorities and pay the bills, more or less, thus determining what the world body does. International civil servants would not exist without member states, nor could a permanent institution of member states operate without a secretariat.

Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore distinguish five roles for the first UN: “as an agent of great powers doing their bidding; as a mechanism for interstate cooperation; as a governor of international society of states; as a constructor of the social world; and as a legitimation forum.” States pursue national interests in this arena, which varies from “high politics” in the Security Council to “low politics” in the boards and governing councils of UN funds and specialized agencies. States caucus in regional groups for the General Assembly and in smaller groups for numerous issues. Notions of
the first UN find a home in virtually all IR theory: for a realist emphasizing self-interested states within an anarchical system; for a liberal institutionalist looking for a stage where states pursue mutual interests and reduce transaction costs; for a proponent of the English School seeking to foster shared norms and values in an international society; for a constructivist looking for a creative agent for ideational change and identity shaping; and for a pragmatist seeking a place to legitimate specific values and actions.

The second UN is also a distinct sphere, consisting of career and long-serving staff members who are paid through assessed and voluntary contributions. This international civil service is a legacy of the League of Nations. Article 101 of the UN Charter calls for a core of officials to tackle international problems. A leading advocate for the second UN was Dag Hammarskjöld. His May 1961 speech at Oxford does not ignore the reality that the international civil service exists to carry out decisions made by states; but it emphasizes that a UN official could and should pledge allegiance to striving for a larger collective good, rather than defending the interests of the country that issues his or her passport. The practice of reserving senior UN positions for former high-level officials approved by their home governments undermines the integrity of secretariats. Moreover, a shadow today hangs over the UN Secretariat as a result of corruption in the Oil-for-Food Programme, sexual exploitation by peacekeepers, and the Staff Council’s vote of no-confidence in the secretary-general in May 2006.

Nonetheless, a basic idealism continues to animate the second UN. The likes of Ralph Bunche and Brian Urquhart indicate that autonomy and integrity are realistic expectations of international civil servants. Today’s professional and support staff number approximately 55,000 in the UN proper and another 20,000 in the specialized agencies. This number excludes temporary staff in peace operations (about 100,000 in 2007) and the staff of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group (another 15,000). These figures represent substantial growth from the 500 employees in the UN’s first year at Lake Success and the peak total of 700 staff employed by the League of Nations.

The second UN does more than simply carry out marching orders from governments. UN officials also present ideas to tackle problems, debate them formally and informally with governments, take initiatives, advocate for change, turn general decisions into specific programs of action, and work for implementation. None of this should surprise. It would be a strange and impotent national civil service whose staff took no initiatives or showed no leadership, simply awaiting instructions from the government in power. The second UN is no different, except that the formal decisionmakers are government representatives on boards meeting quarterly, annually, or even biennially. With the exception of the Security Council, decisionmaking and responsibility for implementation in most parts of the UN system, especially
the development funds and specialized agencies, depend in large part on the executive head or a staff member of the second UN.

**What Is the Third UN?**

From the outset, nonstate actors have been active in UN corridors and field projects. The Charter’s 1945 Preamble opened with a clarion call from “We the Peoples of the United Nations,” when one might have expected “We the Representatives of Sovereign Member States.” Article 71 explicitly made room for NGOs in UN debates. Nonetheless, the extent to which nonstate actors are now routinely part of what passes for “international” relations by “intergovernmental” organizations is striking.

Involvement of NGOs has been a routine part of all UN-sponsored global conferences since the 1972 Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, when the conference secretary-general, Maurice Strong, insisted on their presence. NGO parallel meetings, usually called “forums,” have become a prominent fixture of deliberations and have been an important force in pressing for more forward-looking policies. For the Millennium Summit and the 2005 World Summit, special hearings involving NGOs were organized in advance.

Although the terminology may sound odd, it is appropriate to refer to such networks as a “third United Nations.” Many individuals who have played an essential role in the world organization’s intellectual and norm-building activities were neither government officials nor international civil servants. Moreover, many key contributors to ideas as members of the first and the second UN had significant prior associations with a university, a policy think tank, or an NGO—or joined one after leaving government or UN service. Many individuals have served as members or chairs of independent panels and commissions that examined emerging problems not yet on the international radar screen. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a prominent example. Many also served as staff or board members of NGOs, and most have attended ad hoc global conferences that pull together a range of actors on the international stage.

We define the third UN as comprising NGOs, academics, consultants, experts, independent commissions, and other groups of individuals that routinely engage with the first and the second UN and thereby influence UN thinking, policies, priorities, and actions. The key characteristic for this third sphere is its independence from governments and UN secretariats. Thus, legislators in Parliamentarians for Global Action as well as local governmental officials in United Cities and Local Governments would be part of the third UN by virtue of their position outside the executive branch of government.

Deciding who is in or out of the third UN depends on the issue and the period in question. But the third UN consists of “outsiders”—that is, persons...
who are not on the regular payroll of a government or a secretariat—who complement the “insiders” of the other two United Nations in collective efforts to generate, debate, implement, and disseminate ideas and programs. That said, the distinction between outsiders and insiders can blur in the case of many prominent individuals who move in and out of institutions through a “revolving door.”

At the same time, it is essential to distinguish persons who are neither government representatives nor international civil servants when they make certain contributions to the UN. Outsiders are often better placed to be more adventurous and critical. Anyone who has attended a UN-sponsored global conference is quite aware that Secretariat staffs who organize these meetings are joined not only by representatives of governments who make decisions, but also by a legion of NGOs, think tanks, and academics. The Beijing conference on women in 1995 perhaps illustrated this interaction most visibly.12 The same is true of the board meetings of many UN funds, programs, and specialized agencies.

In spite of the Global Compact and other schemes for “corporate social responsibility,” we do not include the for-profit sector in the third UN. The primary focus of business is not on any larger community of interests, but on financial bottom lines. Companies also have relatively little direct interaction with the first and the second UN in the context of the organization’s policy formulation and project execution.13 Business groups that promote fair trade or microcredit, for instance, are better considered as NGOs. The same holds for corporate-centered NGOs such as the World Business Council for Sustainable Development and the World Economic Forum.

The mass media that follow UN activities often have an impact on international thinking and action. However, their primary role as a category of actors in global governance is to report on and not to alter policy. For this reason we do not include media organizations within the third UN. On the other hand, investigative journalists and columnists who are in the opinion business can be aptly considered part of the third UN as influential individuals, like scholars and policy analysts.

In brief, then, three main groups of nonofficial actors compose the third UN: nongovernmental organizations; academics and expert consultants; and independent commissions of eminent persons. None of these subgroupings is monolithic. The importance of particular individuals and organizations in multiactor policymaking or project execution varies by issue and over time. Thus “membership” in the third UN is temporary and contingent.

Eight roles played collectively by the first, second, and third UNs can be summarized as: providing a forum for debate; generating ideas and policies; legitimating ideas and policies; advocating for ideas and policies; implementing or testing ideas and policies in the field; generating resources to
pursue ideas and policies; monitoring progress in the march of ideas and the implementation of policies; and occasionally burying ideas and policies. As is elaborated in subsequent sections, the importance of each role and the importance of each of the three UNs in those roles varies depending on how new a particular policy approach is at a given moment, and how much it flies in the face of strong national or regional interests and received wisdom.

Intellectual energies among the three UNs blend. Indeed, there is often synergy. A revolving door turns as academics and national political actors move inside to take staff positions in UN secretariats, or UN staff members leave to join NGOs, universities, or national office and subsequently engage from outside, but are informed by experience inside. Primary loyalties to, or location in, one of the three UNs provide strategic and tactical advantages and disadvantages, which give these analytical distinctions their importance.

Nongovernmental Organizations
In the last six decades, there has been a dramatic growth in the role and influence of NGOs in UN corridors as elsewhere. The result is a qualitatively different debate than would take place without their inputs. “I think life would be duller without the NGOs, and there would probably be much less point to it also,” said Viru Dayal, the former chef de cabinet of two UN secretaries-general. “Besides, civil society knows where the shoe pinches. They know when to laugh and they know when to cry.”

Most UN global meetings attract NGO participants, and in large numbers. Usually the scenario does not resemble the Seattle Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in late 1999, when tens of thousands of protesters filled the streets. In fact, most involvements by the third UN are more peaceful and more supportive of the other two UNs. While estimates vary because of different ways that delegates are counted, the orders of magnitude are striking. The Earth Summit in Rio in 1992 had some 17,000 nongovernmental participants, the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 drew some 32,000 (including 5,000 Chinese), and UNICEF’s World Summit for Children in New York in 1990 stirred over a million people worldwide to join in candlelight vigils.

Commentators rightly emphasize the last few decades of NGO growth, but the phenomenon has been gaining momentum over two centuries, beginning with the antislavery movement late in the eighteenth century. Before and during the San Francisco conference in 1945, US-based private actors of the third UN were especially visible, including forty-two consultants officially recognized by Washington, plus some 160 other observers from diverse NGOs, including religious groups.
The Cold War slowed the growth of nonstate actor participation in the UN. The communist bloc and many totalitarian developing countries resisted independent and dissident voices. NGOs in such places were essentially an extension of the state and its views, which prompted the ugly acronym GONGO (government-organized NGO). Indeed, there are still so-called NGOs in repressive countries that are anything but nongovernmental. Purists would also point to problems when democratic governments provide substantial funding to NGOs, even if few visible strings are attached. Moisés Naím’s proposal for a credible rating agency to evaluate the backers, independence, goals, and track records of NGOs is intriguing, as is the signature in 2006 of an Accountability Charter by eleven of the world’s leading international NGOs in the fields of human rights, environment, and social development. Since the thaw in East-West relations and the changing balance between markets and states, human rights advocates, gender activists, development specialists, and groups of indigenous peoples have become more vocal, operational, and important in contexts that were once thought to be the exclusive prerogatives of states or international secretariats.

Since the 1990s, the sheer growth in NGO numbers has prompted Lester Salamon to discern an “associational revolution” that has been largely driven by communications technology and funding availability. The Union of International Associations currently estimates international NGOs (those operating in more than two countries) to number 25,000. Not all of these organizations are active in UN matters, but the size of the phenomenon is clear. Much NGO engagement with the first and second UNs occurs at headquarters, where some 2,870 NGOs now have “consultative status” and are routinely joined by others without such status. In the field, meanwhile, outsourcing and subcontracting to members of the third UN also reflect the changing balance between markets and states in global governance. Executing predetermined activities as subcontractors is not the same as shaping policy, but many dual-purpose NGOs use field experience in advocacy and vice versa. In fact, NGOs had already become substantial executors of projects funded by the second UN by the time that the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) agreed to more flexible NGO accreditation standards in 1996.

NGOs in the third UN are not always appealing bodies. Much has been made of the ugly elements of local civil society in the genocides in Rwanda and Sudan. NGOs with direct links to the UN also include “nasty” social movements, or what Cyril Ritchie has called “criminals, charlatans and narcissists.” For instance, the National Rifle Association hardly pursues a human security agenda that most NGOs with consultative status at the UN would support. In humanitarian emergencies, a number of mom-and-pop organizations as well as larger operations proselytize and/or have agendas that reflect the biases of government funders—especially evident in Afghanistan and Iraq—that are anathema to most NGOs in the third UN. But despite
such shortcomings in some cases, NGOs have become integral to UN processes and to global governance more generally.

Academics, Consultants, and Think Tanks
The bulk of scholarship about the United Nations and the main substantive issues on the world organization’s agenda emanates from universities, specialist research institutes, and learned societies in North America and Western Europe. During World War II, the notion that the UN would be a major instrument of Washington’s foreign policy attracted support from US foundations. For example, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace actively followed and promoted research on the new organization by scholars and by officials from the League of Nations. Such support has continued in fits and starts since then, including the $1 billion gift from the business leader Ted Turner in 1997 to create the UN Foundation and Better World Fund. Other external policy research organizations with intimate links to UN affairs include the Stanley Foundation, the International Peace Institute, the Center for International Cooperation, and the Center for Humanitarian Dialogue. Two professional associations, the Society for International Development (founded in 1967) and the Academic Council on the United Nations System (founded in 1987), emerged as part of policy research networks focused on the UN and the international system.

“Knowledge networks” have become an analytical concern for students of global governance because they create and transfer knowledge and influence policymakers irrespective of location. These networks often frame debate on a particular issue, provide justifications for alternatives, and catalyze national or international coalitions to support chosen policies and advocate change. What Peter Haas called “epistemic communities” influence policy, especially during times of uncertainty and change when the demand for expertise increases. Much literature relates to scientific elites with particular expertise in areas such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the environment. A related approach to knowledge networks is Peter Hall’s earlier study of the cross-national dissemination of ideas among experts in the postwar period, when Keynesianism spread largely because it “acquired influence over the economic policies of a major power and was exported as that nation acquired increasing hegemony around the world.”

Three panels of experts in the late 1940s and early 1950s—not then called “knowledge networks”—produced pioneering reports for the United Nations that launched the world organization’s use of external expertise: *National and International Measures for Full Employment; Measures for the Economic Development of Under-Developed Countries; and Measures for International Economic Stability.* These groups permitted the entry of outside expertise—including prescient thinking by such later Nobel laureates
as W. Arthur Lewis and Theodore W. Schultz—as parts of teams of prominent economists from different parts of the world, supported by professionals within the UN Secretariat.

In the 1960s, the Committee for Development Planning (since 1999, “Policy” has replaced “Planning” in the acronym, CDP) was created and initially chaired by Jan Tinbergen, who later won the first Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences. The CDP usually comprised twenty-four economists, all unpaid and appointed in their personal capacities by the UN secretary-general, without nomination by governments. The CDP met a few times a year to bring external expertise into the UN regarding development and international economic policy.

A strong ethical dimension was present among such teams—pursuing a world of greater economic and social justice with less poverty and a more equitable income distribution. Nobel economics laureate Lawrence Klein, an eloquent member of the third UN on disarmament and development, observed, “I believe that it would be quite valuable if the UN had a better academic world contact.” Indeed, the import of new thinking, approaches, and policies from scholars in the third UN remains vital to the world organization, as suggested by recent reports from Jeffrey Sachs and the UN Millennium Project.

The UN Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) was the first of a handful of United Nations think tanks, and the core fourteen research entities of the UN University (UNU) are now collectively the largest. While the staffs of these units have somewhat more autonomy than most international civil servants, UNRISD and UNU remain part of the second UN because their research agendas are subject to subtle and not-so-subtle financial pressure from governments. However, they often provide a backdoor channel for external academic and analytical expertise.

**Independent Commissions**

In addition to NGOs and experts, some of the loudest and most challenging voices in the third UN come from “eminent persons.” For example, as part of the lead-up to the UN’s sixtieth anniversary, Secretary-General Kofi Annan convened the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change. As part of the follow-up to the September 2005 World Summit, Annan pulled together the High-level Panel on System-wide Coherence in the areas of development, humanitarian aid, and the environment.

This tradition goes back to the late 1960s and the panel, headed by former Canadian prime minister Lester B. Pearson, that produced *Partners in Development* (1969). The so-called Pearson Commission was followed by a host of others, including commissions on development issues chaired by former German chancellor Willy Brandt (1980 and 1983); on common security
by former Swedish prime minister Olof Palme (1982); on environment and development by serving Norwegian prime minister Gro Harlem Brundtland (1987); on humanitarian problems by Iranian and Jordanian princes Sadruddin Aga Khan and Hassan bin Talal (1988); on South-South cooperation by serving Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere (1990); on global governance by former Swedish prime minister Ingvar Carlsson and the Commonwealth secretary-general Shridath Ramphal (1995); on humanitarian intervention and state sovereignty by former Australian minister of external affairs Gareth Evans and former Algerian ambassador to the UN Mohamed Sahnoun (2001); on human security by Sadako Ogata and Amartya Sen (2003); and on civil society by former Brazilian president Fernando Henrique Cardoso (2004). There are also commissions that are recalled more by their sponsors’ names rather than those of their chairs—for example, the Club of Rome (1972) and the Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict (1997).

This type of expertise—combining knowledge with political punch and access to decisionmakers—has been influential in nourishing ideas. Commissioners speak in their individual capacities and can move beyond what passes for received wisdom in governments and secretariats. The reports are normally presented to the secretary-general, who can point to multinational composition and a variety of perspectives behind a consensus and thus use the findings and recommendations more easily than ideas emanating from inside the Secretariat, which many governments believe should not go beyond established intergovernmental positions. Research teams are often led by academics and usually located “outside” the UN but sometimes temporarily in the employ of the second UN. The researchers play an important role not only by supporting the commissioners’ deliberations with necessary documentation, but also by providing an entry point for ideas that eventually get carried forward by the commissioners and the published panel reports.

These examples indicate the utility for international deliberations of a mechanism that takes visible individuals who made careers as senior governmental or intergovernmental officials, or both, but who subsequently—as independent and usually prominent elders—are willing to voice criticisms at higher decibel levels and make more controversial recommendations than when they occupied official positions. These commissions are a key part of the third UN even if they are established and bankrolled by the first or the second UN. They can formulate ideas beyond what passes for political correctness in governments and secretariats.

Interactions Among the Three UNs
Understanding the interactions among the three United Nations is crucial in the analysis of global policy processes. It is a difficult task in view of the
increasing ease of movement by talented people who contribute to UN deliberations and actions from several vantage points during their careers. In the contemporary world, it is common for leading policy figures to have significant exposure to all three United Nations. For instance, Adebayo Adedeji was a junior academic working on UN issues before becoming a government minister, before taking over as the head of the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and before setting up his own UN-related NGO in Nigeria after his retirement from the ECA secretariat in Addis Ababa. Bernard Chidzero was about to start as an academic, then became a UN official, and finally, after Zimbabwe’s independence, became a member of parliament, minister of economic planning and development, and then senior minister of finance. Julia Taft ran the emergency program of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), after having been the CEO of InterAction—a consortium of some 165 US development and humanitarian NGOs—while being a member of a UN committee coordinating emergency operations, and after having headed the US State Department’s Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. Boutros Boutros-Ghali earned a reputation as a professor of international law and a government minister in Egypt before spending five years at the helm of the United Nations. He subsequently headed two NGOs in Europe after his failed bid for reelection as the UN’s top civil servant.

Figure 1 depicts the three United Nations as separate circles whose overlaps convey interactive space. This article focuses on where the three come together (D), but also addresses where the third and the second interact (C), because these networked spaces have been underexplored in the literature and help explain shifts in ideas, policies, priorities, and practices. The universe of UN activities is illustrated by these interplays in combination with the interactions between the first and the second United Nations (A) as well as between the first and the third (B), spaces that have received more significant scholarly scrutiny. The interactions between governments and secretariats have constituted the bulk of UN studies over the past six decades, while those between governments and nonstate actors have become prevalent as an explanation for influencing many international policy outcomes.

In terms of advancing ideas, the most obvious target is the first UN, since member states make policies, sign treaties, deploy soldiers to halt mass murder or keep the peace, and establish priorities and budgets. Ideas can also emanate from visionary individuals within the first UN. Examples include Canadian foreign minister Lester B. Pearson’s call for the first peacekeeping effort in 1956 and the Swedish government’s decision to organize the first ad hoc global conference on the human environment in 1972.

In addition, influential ideas sometimes gravitate from the second UN to the first UN. An intriguing example is the notion of declining terms of
trade, a thesis formulated by Hans Singer in 1949 at UN headquarters in the Department of Economic Affairs and rapidly further developed and applied by Raúl Prebisch at the UN Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA). The two intellectual stalwarts were highly influential members of the second UN who pulled together the initial data and argument. They then publicized the problems created by the tendency of the terms of trade to move against primary commodities, thus creating persistent balance-of-payments problems for poor countries and slowing their economic growth. This argument, radical at the time, framed debates on economic development for the 1960s and 1970s and led to the establishment in 1964 of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD).

However, this article focuses on the third UN, whose members often launch or doggedly pursue notions about which important players in the first or the second UN are less than enthusiastic. “Sovereignty as responsibility,” which Francis M. Deng and Roberta Cohen deftly designed in the late 1980s and early 1990s to help foster international assistance and protection for internally displaced persons (IDPs), in turn was made more visible and palatable in 2001 by the report of the International Commission
on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect*. For decades, few members of the first or the second UN embraced the notion of international responsibility to enforce basic human rights standards because of sacrosanct Article 2 (7) of the Charter. When Secretary-General Kofi Annan dared to speak out in 1998–1999, many member states were livid and many staff members were baffled. Nonetheless, this emerging norm figured in the consensus of the 2005 World Summit, where it was one of the few issues on which progress was made.

In many instances, various constellations of the first, the second, and the third UN constitute a like-minded partnership to move ahead on issues, with or without some member states, including major powers. One prominent case was the coming together of like-minded governments, UN officials, analysts, and NGOs in the Ottawa Process, which in 1997 produced the convention banning antipersonnel landmines. A similarly diverse coalition led to the adoption of the 1998 Rome Statute, which established the International Criminal Court.

In another variation, members of the second UN may sometimes turn to the third UN to formulate ideas that are controversial but propitious to place on the agenda and pursue when they come from nonstate actors. One of the clearest examples is the idea of “human development,” which UNDP administrator William Draper imported through the work of Mahbub ul Haq and Amartya Sen. The concept has seen continual refinements since the publication of the first *Human Development Report* in 1990. Certainly, some UNDP staff members were keen on the notion, but the technical details were the work of minds outside the Secretariat. These outside-insiders also took the political flack from governments that were irritated with the publicity given to their embarrassing positions in the rankings. Indeed, many governments at first disputed the appropriateness of paying the bill for such research, a complaint arising from disgruntled governments as viewed in the research about international commissions as well.

### A Research Agenda

Too little is known about the precise roles and impact of the third UN. In particular, future research should aim to fill three lacunae: mapping networks; tracing movements of individuals; and measuring relative influence in specific settings.

**Mapping Networks**

The first pressing task is the rather unexciting, though necessary, exercise of systematic data gathering in order to acquire thick descriptions of the loose networks of individuals and groups across the three UNs. Lacking such data, we cannot move beyond black boxes and sweeping generaliza-
tions as explanations for action or inaction. Anne-Marie Slaughter, for instance, has done ground-breaking work in tracking transgovernmental networks, for which the building blocks are not “states but parts of states: courts, regulator agencies, ministries, legislatures.”41 Other scholars have dissected networks of transnational activists organized to “multiply channels of access to the international system,”42 transnational movements to end the Cold War,43 and knowledge-based networks.44

Multiactor policymaking networks for the United Nations are less precisely defined, which poses a substantial analytical challenge. However, the basic notion that transnational actors contribute to changes in thinking and policy is similar to that put forward by Slaughter. As such, social network analysis holds the promise of better being able to capture complex relationships among the three UNs.45 This research method focuses on the patterns of interactions among actors rather than on the attributes of individual units. Some networks have informal, decentralized, and horizontal relationships, while others have a more hierarchical organization. There is little definitional consensus about networks, given wide variations in structures. However, network analysts do agree that, regardless of the type of structure, the nodes (or actors) in these networks are interdependent. They are therefore “not seen as acting in isolation, but within complex linkages with other actors that influence decision making.”46

Social network analysis potentially can help explain which portions of which networks are more important than others under specified circumstances. Key individuals are so embedded in diplomatic, policy, research, and other social networks that separating them for analytical purposes is extremely challenging, but nonetheless it is a critical part of the contemporary puzzle of international cooperation and global governance. The next step is to move the discussion beyond which nonstate actors matter toward determining more precisely how each matters in the UN’s policy-shaping process.

Tracing Individuals’ Trajectories
The second research area involves mapping the movements of key individuals who are active in UN policymaking. In view of the increasing ease of movement by policy professionals, a proposition to be tested is that prominent individuals may be more influential, internationally or nationally, because of their firsthand exposure to a wide variety of institutions. Many individuals are, in effect, “cross-dressers” whose membership at any moment in one of the three UNs reflects the extent to which they are embedded in larger social networks.

As Barnett and Finnemore observe, “Many UN staff and field personnel have varied careers and move back and forth between UN appointments, jobs within their own governments at home, and positions in the private sector, universities, and NGOs.” They go on to note that work by sociologists,
anthropologists, and scholars of organizational behavior indicates that such backgrounds are important in explaining flows of information and individual behavior. "Good network analysis and good ethnographic work on the UN would contribute greatly to our understanding of its behavior." While privacy legislation applying to personnel files may be an obstacle to obtaining relevant data, a pertinent research task is to track career movements and to explore whether exposure to the culture of an international secretariat, for instance, is an asset in career development in government or NGO service, and vice versa.

**Weighing Influence**

Distinguishing forums for state decisionmaking, international secretariats, and the outside-insiders are essential to determine which UN is behind which policy or action, and to what extent they are responsible for desirable outcomes to be emulated or for undesirable results to be avoided. Analysts of global governance are obliged to design better empirical indicators to move beyond the adage that success has numerous parents, but failure is an orphan.

States rarely are willing to blame themselves for breakdowns in international order and society; and UN secretariats often indiscriminately fault governments for their lack of political will. The first UN has a convenient scapegoat in the second UN, and vice versa. Sometimes the third UN adds to this confusion, blaming or praising the world organization in general. But in other cases—say, the influence of the Bretton Woods institutions on structural adjustment policy or the slowness of developed country governments to finance debt relief—members of the third UN have pointed fingers with more precision and effect.

Agency is crucial, but students of global governance know too little about the relative influences of the actors in what Conor Cruise O’Brien aptly called the “sacred drama” of the United Nations. The stage with Claude’s two United Nations has, over the last six decades, become increasingly crowded with other actors who play more than bit parts. States are still on the marquee, and national interests have not receded as the basis for decisionmaking; and international secretariats still largely serve these state masters but with margins for independence and maneuver. And there is substantial evidence that the third UN is increasingly salient—sometimes in the wings or dressing room, sometimes in the limelight. Hence, numerous individuals and institutions that are neither states nor their creation in the form of intergovernmental bureaucracies contribute to and circumscribe virtually every deliberation, decision, and operation by either of the other two UNs.

Deciphering what Robert Cox and Harold Jacobson long ago called “the anatomy of influence” requires identifying the strengths and weaknesses
of a seemingly ever growing number of actors. A third research task involves identifying better criteria to measure which actors have contributed to “success” and which to “failure” within the United Nations. And a comparable research task for global governance would apply to other intergovernmental arenas—for example the “third EU” and the “third OECD.”

Conclusion
A special section of the journal Foreign Policy in fall 2002 was titled, “What Is the International Community?”\textsuperscript{50} The lead-in quipped, “Invoking the international community is a lot easier than defining it.” It no longer makes sense to use the term restrictively to states alone, because nonstate characters are playing essential roles with respect to virtually every global challenge to human survival and dignity. International lawyers conceive of the international community narrowly in terms of “peace-loving states”—that is, euphemistically, the first UN. Other observers employ the concept more expansively and also include the creations of states in the form of intergovernmental secretariats—that is, the second UN. Still other commentators also embrace nonstate actors operating internationally—that is, the third UN.

We hazard a step in this wider direction by beginning to parse the contemporary international community in terms of interactions among three United Nations. Filling the glaring gaps in global governance\textsuperscript{51} leads us to urge that “the UN”—first, second, and third—continue to pool energies and make maximum use of its comparative advantages.

The value of the third UN, in practice as well as in theory, is clear. States and intergovernmental organizations cannot adequately address threats to human security. Whether the UN is seen as a convener, a norm entrepreneur, or an operator, we the peoples require all the helping hands we can get—and many of those are toiling in the third United Nations. 

Notes
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21. Union of International Associations, “International Organizations by Type (Table 1),” in *Yearbook of International Organizations*, available at www.uia.org/uiastats/stbv196.htm.


30. Weiss et al., *UN Voices*, p. 373.


44. Stein et al., *Networks of Knowledge*, p. 2.


