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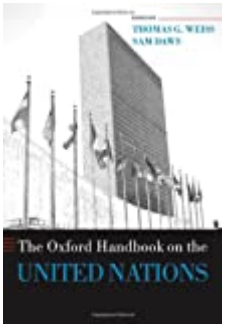

Thomas G. Weiss, Sam Daws. *The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. 810 S. $150.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-19-927951-7.

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Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (June, 2008)

T. G. Weiss u. a. (Hrsg.): The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations

The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations is a remarkable contribution to the research on the UN system and a valuable guide to scholars, practitioners and journalists. My primary objective is to ascertain to what extent the handbook â admittedly not dealing primarily with the history of the UN â is equally helpful for historians as there appears to be a remarkable lack of historical inquiry with regard to international organisations as subjects of historical research, including the United Nations system. Legal reference handbooks, which provide highly helpful introductions into the research of international organisations (IOs), do exist; as do political science manuals or international relations (IR) studies. However, other than these two obliging approaches a historical view is predominantly marginalised when one examines IOs as a general phenomenon. Of late, there have been an increasing number of institutional histories concerned with specific organisations, but only occasional studies dealing with the emergence and development of international institutions as a general historical field of research. See Iriye, Akira, Global Community. The Role of International Organizations in the Making of the Contemporary World, Berkeley 2002. GÃ¶tz emphasises, correctly, that the most urgent task is to give the UN a history. GÃ¶tz, Norbert, âSechzig Jahre und kein bisschen weise: Die Vereinten Nationen in der postnationalen Konstellationâ, in: Neue Politische Literatur, 53 (2007) 1, p. 54. In accordance, I will scrutinize more closely the historical elements of the volume.

This handbook on the United Nations is indeed initially promising as the most renowned experts (both from the world of academia and former UN officials) with regard to the UN system are detailed among the almost fifty contributors. Furthermore, the prestigious UN Intellectual History Project, led by one of the editors, Thomas G. Weiss at the Ralph Bunche Institute of the City University of New York, is co-responsible for this commendable handbook. Although most of the contributorsâ insider experience constitutes a remarkable benefit, the majority of the authors are legal experts, political scientists or international relations scholars â not a single historian is present among the authors. This explains why the historical parts are mostly written from a genuinely political science perspective. To a historian, though, it seems somewhat amiable that the editors refuse to refer

to electronic resources (i.e. websites), preferring printed sources. The editors abstain from adding numerous original documents in the handbook and refer to their availability on the UN homepage â a worthy preference.

In general, the articles provide broad overviews of the specific topics. Most impressively reflect the state of the art and several refer to related theories. The editors justify the missing comprehensive bibliography with the abundant references to be found in the endnotes of each article â and with the need to save some space (p. 19). In addition, on 17 pages the appendix 1 offers further reading to each article and thus makes up for the missing bibliography. An overwhelming dominance of Anglophone references, however, mars the positive account of the handbook, as authors not publishing in English deserve also to be taken into consideration - at least to some extent. The articles mostly refer to US scholarship, less so to European research, and largely ignore studies from Latin American, African or Asian scholars. Despite the preponderance of analyses and documents in English, the individual sections provide an outstanding overview on research endeavours undertaken with regard to the topics.

The Oxford Handbook on the United Nations is divided into eight main parts: 1) an introduction on âWorld Politics: Continuity and Change since 1945â, 2) âTheoretical Frameworksâ, 3) âPrincipal Organsâ, 4) âRelationships with other Actorsâ, 5) âInternational Peace and Securityâ, 6) âHuman Rightsâ, 7) âDevelopmentâ and 8) âProspects for Reformâ. In the following, I will concentrate on the parts relating to theory, the main organs and development, as they may be regarded as representative.

In the introduction, the editors resume Inis Claudeâs image of the âtwo United Nationsâ: one in which the member states make decisions, the other consisting of international civil servants. Claude, Inis L. Jr., Swords into Plowshares. The Problems and Prospects of International Organization, New York 1956. In addition, a âthirdâ UN is envisaged, consisting of ââ¦important players who are part of a parallel world of independent experts and consultants whose job descriptions include research, policy analysis, and idea-mongering.â (pp. 16/17). The insertion of a section relating to knowledge and external expert networks, as well as other outside actors constituting the âthird UNâ, would probably have been advisable. See Weiss Thomas G.; Carayannis, Tatiana; Jolly, Richard, The âThirdâ United Nations, unpublished manuscript (to be published). According to Weiss and Daws, the Handbook should provide a ââ¦better understanding of the origins, history, problems, and contributions of the world organization and the UN system as a whole.â (pp. 18/19).

In the section dealing with âTheoretical Frameworksâ, Martha Finnemore and Michael Barnett are the authors of the segment concerned with political perspectives, where they knowledgably categorise five roles attributed to the United Nations connected to theories of international relations: 1) the UN as agent of the big powers, 2) the UN as mechanism for interstate cooperation, 3) the UN as governor of the society of states, 4) the UN as the constructor of the social world and 5) the UN as a structure of legitimation. According to JosÃ© Alvarezâs quite readable account on legal perspectives, a highly noticeable change is ââ¦the addition of IOs themselves as relevant actors, a change that continues apace as IOs reproduce themselves or generate a proliferation of subsidiary organs.â (p. 68). Here, he shares the view that IOs are actors, which has also been prominently put forward by Barnett and Finnemore. Barnett, Michael; Finnemore, Martha, Rules for the World. International Organizations in Global Politics, Ithaca 2004. Remarkably, Alvarez also mentions critical voices (the so-called âcritsâ) from the Third World that refused the Western notion of international law as promoting particular ideologies, mostly those linked to Western capitalism: âThese historical accounts serve to highlight the bias and blindspots of those Europeans and Americans âpresent at the creationâ, as well as the ways their institutions and approaches to law have served the needs of their rich states of origin, and may even be perpetuating the colonist project through institutions with a global reach.â (p. 73). As the political and legal approaches outline the basic theoretical models and provide an overview on the different schools of analysis, these sections are indeed valuable also for historical enquiries. The title of the third contribution in the first segment dealing with theoretical approaches to âEvolution in Knowledgeâ by Leon Gordenker and Christer JÃ¶nsson can be misleading as it concerns itself with knowledge of the UN system and not the work of specialised institutions such as UNESCO, for instance. But, especially for historians, this overview may be useful for locating relevant sources relevant to the UN. See Baer, George W. (ed./comp.), International Organizations 1918-1945. A Guide to Research and Research Materials, Wilmington, DE 1991 (revised ed., first publ. in 1981). An additional historical overview in part two or elsewhere might have proved helpful in providing an alternative point of view. See, for instance: Kennedy, Paul, Parliament of Man. The Past, Present, and Future of the United Nations, New York 2006.

The second main section deals with the principle organs of the UN, namely the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Secretary General and her/his Secretariat, the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and the Trusteeship Council. Here, experts and (former) practitioners provide quite informative accounts concerned with legal and administrative provisions â and their actual relevance in practice. Peterson clearly states that the concept of the General Assembly reflects European ideas: âThe General Assembly expresses and reinforces the Westphalian norm of sovereign equality of states in three ways. It includes all UN member states, gives each of their delegations one vote, and adopts resolutions by majority â a simple majority for most resolutions and a two-thirds majority for those issues listed in article 18 of the Charter or identified by the members as addressing âimportant questionsâ.â (p. 98). Furthermore, one could interpret the categories of the six Assembly committees as mirroring an exclusively European/Western understanding of society and world order. First Committee: Disarmament and International Security; Second: Economic and Financial; Third: Social, Humanitarian, and Cultural; Fourth: Special Political and Decolonisation; Fifth: Administrative and Budgetary (organisational concerns); Sixth: Legal (development of international law).

The significant analysis of the UNâs Secretariat, James O. C. Jonah, also provides interesting information in relation to the very formation of an international civil service â an idea that was first introduced by Eric Drummond in the League of Nations and, thus, is â from a historical perspective â comparatively new. The USSR opposed the idea of an independent international civil service in the very foundation and instead sought an intergovernmental Secretariat with staff members to represent their governments. But in the formative years of the UN, Western states were also not very enthusiastic about the idea of an international civil service (pp. 161/162). In the 1960s, when many former colonies became independent and joined the UN, the composition of the Secretariat also began to change: âAs a result of the turmoil during the Congo crisis, it was considered prudent to recruit nationals of developing countries to the top ranks of the Secretariat. It may be true to say that some token representations were made with respect to nationals of the developing world.â (p. 163). In this context, it is of utmost importance, also for further research, to mention the role the International Civil Service Commission (ICSC), established by the General Assembly in 1974, has played regarding the statute, mandate and functions. However, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank Group are not members of ICSC as they have their own rules.

In the article on the Secretary-General Edward Newman explains the Charter provisions relating to the post and how the character, skills and, indeed, fortune of the respective UN head could make a difference. I would have been interested in additional information as to why the well-known arrangement between the powerful states prevailed over more democratic selection procedures and criteria such as qualifications. For instance, why were demands for more meritocratic selection conditions deposed, by whom and in what global historical context, and whether realistic alternatives existed? (pp. 176/177). Although Newman duly explains the articles that have been newly introduced with regard to the Secretary General, the historical approach is rather of secondary importance here.

For me, it is to some extent telling that a section of the entry on the Security Council is headlined, somewhat mockingly, âSome Historyâ (p. 120). And this segment (not even 2 of 17 pages) is correspondingly very thin in relation to a historical view. For a brief but valuable historical analysis, see: Bourantonis, Dimitris, The History and Politics of UN Security Reform, Milton Park 2005. For a historian, again, it would have been interesting to review interpersonal relationships: Who were the persons that retained influence in the Security Council? What were the (externally unknown) personal clashes that led to the postponement of important decisions? Here, the history of the very establishment of the Security Council as the most important political main body and essential decision-maker (or veto instance) of the United Nations would have been highly interesting â and not only for historians.

ECOSOC is one of the six UN main bodies, responsible for two broad areas: economic and social matters (international economic, social, cultural, educational, health and related matters) and human rights. Gert Rosenthal points out that ECOSOC has hardly been amended. Its main problem was related to its position between the General Assembly (which was fostering the policy debate) and the Security Council, in charge of development aspects of post-conflict peacemaking. However, the new Human Rights Councilâs composition was placed under the competence of the General Assembly and â unlike its unprestigious predecessor, the Human Rights Commission â not under ECOSOCâs. This promises to give the Economic and Social Council more scope to deal with de-

velopment and humanitarian issues (pp. 136, 141, 146). The last main body in this section is the âTrusteeship Councilâ, presented by Ralph Wilde. This council was responsible for the Trusteeship System, an institutionalised form of colonial administration that mostly follows the League of Nations Mandate arrangements (p. 149). Although no trust territories have existed since 1994, the provisions have not been removed from the Charter. Later in the Handbook, the reader will learn that the Council was probably not abolished because of fears that this would open the Charter as such â of which the Trusteeship Council is a part â for reform (p. 669). The Trusteeship concept ââ¦was invoked to underpin certain colonial arrangements, mainly through the racist notion of civilizational differences whereby certain people were designated âuncivilizedâ for lacking organized societies along Western European lines, thereby requiring the colonial âguardianâ to provide âcivilizedâ governance and, sometimes, also âtutelageâ in order to improve local conditions.â (p. 150). To put the Council in charge to deal with âfailed statesâ was one proposal to provide the institution with new meaning (p. 155).

The historical segment of âCoordinating Economic and Social Affairsâ, in the section relating to âDevelopmentâ by Jacques Fomerand and Dennis Dijkzeul, is quite enlightening and also provides some background information on efforts made to improve coordination between the existing (and newly created) UN bodies since 1945 (see particularly pp. 564-567). They conclude, (also relating to contemporary efforts), that ââ¦UN coordination shows a mixed picture of slow progress within the system and continued complaints and lack of support from most member states.â (p. 578). This is not a surprising finding, but the assessment that there has been at least âslow progressâ is, indeed, noteworthy.

Nico Schrijver provides a very good account of the historical evolution of âNatural Resource Management and Sustainable Developmentâ (pp. 593-603): 10 of 16 text pages are dedicated to history.

Gian Luca Burci treats âHealth and Infectious Diseaseâ. The placement in the development section, however, seems deliberate â as the World Health Organisationâs (WHO) Constitution also enshrines the right to health as a human right, it might also have been included in the human rights part. On the other hand, the WHO Constitution also considers health as âfundamental to the attainment of peaceâ and so the entry might even have been put under the âsecurityâ section. At first glance, Burciâs focus on infectious diseases seems feasible as it were these which led to the creation of the predecessors of the WHO and also preoccupied the organisation after its foundation in 1948. Burci further properly outlines the International Health Regulations of 1951 as an example of the broad norm-setting competences awarded to the institution in contrast to its forerunners. Nevertheless, one may argue that the reduction of health to the topic of contagious diseases runs the risk of being too restrictive.

While the decision to put Health under the main âDevelopmentâ segment still seems plausible, one may ask as to what extent the topic âOrganised Crimeâ is related to development? Besides this, the entry certainly provides a highly interesting analysis of the UN institutionsâ approach in dealing with this problem that has, for some time, been out of reach for national governments.

W. Andy Knight clarifies, in his contribution on âDemocracy and Good Governanceâ, that the United Nations only began to be preoccupied with the advancement of democracy in December 1989, that is, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Resolution 44/146 claimed that political legitimacy requires democracy (p. 625). Knight also reflects on the Western origin of democracy and the implicit imposition of Western values through good governance by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund: Good governance and political liberalisation, as new foreign policy paradigms of Western governments, were imposed upon African governments by external actors as a result of Western disappointment with Africaâs corruption-related economic failure and the simultaneous liberation of Central and Eastern European countries from Soviet rule. (p. 630). Despite his thoughtful remarks regarding the interdependency between human rights respect and democracy (p. 632) Knight does not address the link between democracy and a free market economy. See Karns, Margaret P.; Mingst, Karen A., International Organizations. The Politics and Processes of Global Governance, Boulder 2004, pp. 36. However, it is a beneficial article as it also mentions the existing deficits of the US democratic system, for instance, or the imposition of global governance as a new Western post-Cold War foreign policy doctrine and conditionality for assistance to Third World countries. In contrast, as Richard Jolly outlines in âHuman Developmentâ, the Human Development Index For each country, there are three components: 1) the average length of life of the population, 2) their âknowledgeâ and 3) access to a range of choices sufficient for a decent standard of living. (further defined, 1) life expectancy, 2) literacy and schooling rate, 3) adjusted measure for per-capita income), p. 637. has been developed also by ânon-Westernâ intel-

lectuals, such as Amartya Sen or the former Pakistani Finance Minister Mahbub ul Haq, who founded the Human Development Report (p. 635). In 1990, the UN focal point on human concerns was conceptionalised and applied by the creation of UNDPâs Human Development Report. Here, the links of the human development approach to human security, gender, poverty and deprivation, globalisation, human rights, the Millennium Development Goals and culture are particularly important (p. 634).

In the last main section, relating to âProspects for Reformâ, three articles deal with the principle organs, financing and widening participation within the UN. Edward Luck analyses the history of reforms that already have taken place regarding the principle bodies (General Assembly, Security Council, ECOSOC) and provides a very knowledgeable overview, including historical insights. Luck resumes that often ââ¦movement on the reform of one intergovernmental body is held hostage to progress on another one.â In his view, reform at the UN must be seen as a process and no radical changes may be expected, but at least there is progress (pp. 669/670). Chadwick F. Algerâs text on âWidening Participationâ finally concludes the Handbook â instead of a summary or final considerations by the editors. It highlights the growing need to let NGOs, civil society (the âpeopleâ) but also the business sector and local authorities have more say and influence in the UN system. Alger also presents a couple of tax models to finance the proposed elevated level of non-state participation (email taxing, Tobin tax, arms sales tax, carbon energy tax, tax on extraction of natural resources, aviation fuel tax, p. 712). Interestingly enough, the Church has not been explicitly mentioned as an actor in this context. His account concludes enquiring how the (external) participants may become involved (p. 713).

For a historianâs perspective, some of the âhistorical overviewsâ of the handbook seem rather meagre â but again, this is definitely not the overall aim of the Handbook. Furthermore, a predominant focus upon the post-Cold War era is noticeable. It may be noted that Western-centric notions such as âdevelopmentâ (understood as âsocial and economic advancementâ, pp. 30/31) have not been discussed extensively. Furthermore, a basically sympathetic approach from the contributors towards the organisation results in conclusions that detect failures and deficiencies of the bodies or the system, but generally see some kind of progress. The contributors all tend to be âreformersâ who see no alternative to improving the existing institutions. Not surprisingly, none of the authors criticise the UN system as inappropriate, as it exists today, to face the present and upcoming problems on a global scale. Although politicians and the media correctly suggest that, for example, the daunting climate problems may only be addressed at the global level (under UN supervision?), it remains questionable whether the approach of a minimum consensus can really lead to the apparently necessary and radical reforms in this area.

The aforementioned critical points, nonetheless, do not diminish the highly valuable contribution and intellectual impetus the handbook provides to academics and practitioners, and to a certain extent even to historians. Scholars of IO politics and, despite its thoroughly academic approach, also politicians, advisors and journalists who deal with the UN will certainly appreciate it.

Annotations: