

TRANSFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM: Designs for a Workable World.
By JOSEPH E. SCHWARTZBERG. xxxix and 364 pp; maps, diags., bibliog, index. Tokyo,
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How can the United Nations become a more effective force for good in the world today? That question motivated the writing of this book. Its author---University of Minnesota geography professor emeritus Joseph Schwartzberg---sets out to answer that question with detailed proposals for reforming the key institutions and functions of the UN system. The book is not so much a classic piece of geographic scholarship as it is an extended set of policy prescriptions. At its core, however, is an important political-geographic conundrum: the scale of many of the most pressing problems facing the world today is larger than the scale (or more appropriately the scales) of the state; the book's stated purpose is to contribute to addressing that conundrum. Moreover, *Transforming the United Nations System* bears the clear imprint of an academic geographer's touch: attention to questions of regionalization and environment, a significant use of maps and other geographic visualizations, and an effort to consider how a preoccupation with the pattern of states crowds out other ways of thinking about international relations.

Schwartzberg's book is the culmination of a career-long commitment to the idea that confronting the world's pressing challenges requires strong, institutionalized, international governance. The UN is the only existing institution that has the potential to fulfill that goal, but it is encumbered by many unfair, in many cases dated, arrangements that not only make it weak; they work against meaningful reform, because the UN's ineffectiveness fuels the distrust that undermines support for the institution. Undaunted by the immensity of the reform challenge, Schwartzberg has laid out a blueprint for a radically revised UN system that, he argues, can make it more effective and more respected.

To the best of my knowledge, *Transforming the United Nations System* is the most comprehensive, detailed proposal for UN reform in print. Schwartzberg's reform agenda is aimed at addressing problems of inclusivity and fairness that currently plague the UN system---problems that are a byproduct of the existing anachronistic structure of the Security Council and the current "one nation one vote" principle that is in effect in the General Assembly and almost all other UN agencies. To deal with these issues, Schwartzberg calls for the introduction of a weighted voting system in which the weight of a vote (W) would be determined by a formula that takes into consideration the total population of each voting unit (typically a state) (P), that unit's financial contributions to the UN as a percentage of the institutions' total budget (C), and the percentage that unit represents of the total units participating in a given vote (M). The resulting formula $[W = (P + C + M) / 3]$ would govern voting in the General Assembly, but variations on it

would determine representation in other contexts, including seats on a regionally organized Security Council that is designed to be universally representative.

The better part of Schwartzberg's book is devoted to a systematic examination of the major arms of the UN---the Security Council, the General Assembly, and like---and its most important spheres of activity (for examples, peacekeeping and human-rights monitoring). In each case, Schwartzberg begins by describing how things function now. He then lays out specific reform proposals that he believes are needed. Voting and membership requirements get considerable attention, but so do other matters. Schwartzberg offers broad-ranging suggestions for institutional adjustments that could make the UN more effective and more relevant to the problems of our time. He calls for the creation of a World Parliamentary Assembly (WPA) under the UN that would represent peoples, not governments. He argues in considerable detail for a much stronger role for the Human Rights Council; expanded authority for the International Court of Justice; new, better-trained, and more powerful peacekeeping forces; the transformation of the current Economic and Social Council into an entity that could address environmental matters; and much more. Schwartzberg suggests that collectively these reforms could provide the institutional infrastructure for a constitutionally grounded, world governance system undergirded by one Bill of Rights for states and another for all humans.

Schwartzberg recognizes that his proposals are idealist, but he does not see them as utopian. Conflict, self-interest, and international misunderstandings are not about to disappear, he argues; under the circumstances, what is needed is an institutional framework designed to deal effectively with those problems. His clear goal is to help bring that framework into being by proposing specific reforms that he views as realistic and appropriate. He is modest enough to acknowledge that there may be ways to improve on his proposals, but he hopes the book he has written will generate the kind of reflection and action that could lead to a much more effective UN system.

The book should generate reflection and action because Schwartzberg makes a convincing case for the reforms he proposes. Many are ingenious and all are thought provoking. As such, his book deserves serious attention from anyone interested in the UN and concerned about its future. It could provide an excellent springboard for serious consideration of what a reformed UN system might look like. Beyond the specifics of the UN and its constituent parts, it offers ideas for dealing with international problems that merit broad and deep consideration.

Despite these many strengths, *Transforming the United Nations System* has a couple of notable limitations. First, despite Schwartzberg's exhaustive effort to explain the details of his proposals, he provides relatively few clues as to the larger conceptual-cum-theoretical inclinations---as opposed to political-cum-pragmatic inclinations---that

undergird his thinking. He asserts up front that his book is an empirical rather than a theoretical exercise. That's fine, but empirical choices are always rooted in larger ideas about what is important, what can be effective, and why. Length considerations undoubtedly got in the way, but Schwartzberg provides only cursory insights into his thinking on these matters.

Why, for example, does Schwartzberg arrive at population and the ability to contribute to the UN budget as the most important metrics for a weighted voting system? These are obvious choices, of course, and others have pointed to their importance, but there are other potential metrics---socioeconomic ones being only the most obvious. Schwartzberg clearly appreciates the importance of alternative variables; he turns to them, for example, in a chapter on decision making in special agencies. But academically inclined readers of the book will likely miss more explicit discussion of the conceptual predispositions that lie behind particular reform proposals.

Turning to a different example, what geographical *weltanschauung* led Schwartzberg to the regional delineations that are the basis for his proposed Security Council voting reform? He describes each of the regions in his proposal in some detail, and he readily admits that some of his regional groupings are problematic, but I would have welcomed more discussion of the underlying conceptual strategy that prompted him, for example, to assign Canada to a different region from the U.S., but to group Russia and Ukraine together in one region, or to group Japan and North Korea (along with Mongolia, South Korea, Nepal, and Bhutan!) in another. To be fair, Schwartzberg explains some of the problems with his scheme, and a critique could be made of almost any conceivable regional grouping he might have proposed. Moreover, the fact that he sets forth a specific plan that can be depicted on a single-page map has clear practical advantages. What some readers will miss, though, is more emphasis on underlying principles and priorities, not just specific classification challenges.

Other readers may be disappointed by the thinness of discussion on the difficulties of implementing the proposed reforms that are so painstakingly explained. Asking for an extended discussion of the matter is perhaps unfair given the project's main focus (which is to offer reform proposals). But it is all but impossible to engage seriously with the book's proposals and not think about whether or how they might be implemented.

Schwartzberg comments on implementation are largely confined to a modest-length concluding chapter. He clearly recognizes the immensity of the challenge of bringing his proposals to fruition. But his suggestions for overcoming the challenge are not entirely convincing (or was I just frustrated not to see a clearer path to implementing his many good reform ideas?). Essentially, he argues that proposals along the lines of those set forth in the book may come to be taken seriously because major shifts in public attitudes take place from time to time---and the type of shift that could pave the way for

acceptance of his proposals will become unavoidable given the immensity of the problems the world is facing. Against this backdrop, he proposes global education and the promotion of a cosmopolitan ethos as key ingredients to turning the tide in the direction of meaningful reform.

I am an ardent advocate of global education, and I believe public sentiment can and does evolve over time. But I read *Transforming the United Nations System* at a time when nationalist, right-wing parties were on the march in Europe; when control over both houses of the U.S. Congress fell to a political party with serious misgivings about even the present scope of authority vested in the UN; and when calls for greater disengagement from the “global community” were intensifying in parts of Southwest Asia and beyond. Under the circumstances, the emergence of a more globally enlightened citizenry seems to be up against very long odds. I wish I could have come away from this book with a better sense of how the odds against implementation might be altered.

Schwartzberg may not have wrestled the implementation challenge to the ground, but he has nonetheless performed a significant service in writing this book. It is a volume that will have to be reckoned with by advocates and detractors of the UN alike. Constructive reform ideas are there, spelled out in clear and convincing prose. It is enormously helpful to have a target of the sort Schwartzberg has provided. Rallying broad support for that target, however, will require tectonic conceptual and political shifts---ones that will inevitably be deeply intertwined with the institutional reform process. The crux is to develop a more integrated assessment of reform ideas and implementation challenges.--ALEXANDER B. MURPHY, *University of Oregon*