STUDY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

for

TRANSFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM: DESIGNS FOR A WORKABLE WORLD

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Unit 1: Preface and Introduction (*p. xxviii-xxix, 1-12*)

Fundamental Principles (*p. xxviii-xxix*)

RULE OF LAW
The force of just law must supplant the law of force.

GLOBAL INTERDEPENDENCE
Our planet is an interdependent organism. What nations do on their own territory often affects other nations seriously, either for better or for worse. Nature respects no boundaries.

GLOBAL SOLUTIONS
Global problems require global solutions.

IMPLICATIONS OF SOVEREIGNTY
National sovereignty implies not only national rights, but also national responsibilities. *The meaning of sovereignty is much debated and has changed over time. On p. 239, you will find an excellent statement by former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan. See also the discussion on "Rethinking Sovereignty" at the end of this Unit.*

HUMAN RIGHTS
All humans are entitled to political, civil, economic and social rights, as expressed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT
When nations fail to protect the rights of their citizens, the international community has the responsibility to do so.

QUESTIONS:

1. *Discuss the meaning of each of these six principles. For each, do you agree or disagree? Why do you believe as you do?*

2. *Are any of these principles potentially dangerous? Why?*

Our Changing World *(p. xxix-xxx)*

Since the UN's founding in 1945, we have seen:

1. **a great rise in the number and importance of international and regional agencies;**

2. **economic and social globalization, with much greater roles for non-state actors, especially MNCs (multi-national corporations) and NGOs (non-governmental organizations);**

3. **the subversion of local cultures;**

4. **new voices, especially among youth, demanding political, economic and social justice, and widespread terrorism when those voices are ignored;**

5. **a revolution in communication technology, enabling the virtually instant spread of new ideas and information to all parts of the world.**

Note: We have purposely kept the above list of changes short here, not mentioning climate change, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and other important processes that do not bear directly on the architecture of global governance.

QUESTIONS:

1. *What are the implications of the changes noted above?*

2. *What are the downsides of those changes?*

3. *How can we guard against harmful "unintended consequences"?*

4. *What other major changes demand our attention?*

5. *Can nations by themselves cope adequately with the pace of change? If not, why not?*

Choices for the Rich (the "Global North") *(p. xxx)*

Here are a few possibilities:

Option A: Isolationism coupled with nationalism, looking only after one's own national interests and relying on military might to keep potential enemies at bay.

Option B: Patronage of poor nations, allocating a small portion of one's resources to meeting the world's needs (enough to maintain others as dependent clients, but not enough to bring about major changes), co-opting and supporting national elites.

Option C: Globalism, working for needed changes in our system of global governance to promote democracy and justice.

Choices for the Poor (the "Global South") *(p. xxx)*

Here are a few possibilities:

Option A: Fatalistically accepting the continuation of global injustice and adopting policies acceptable to the powerful.

Option B: Violently demanding justice (with the consequent likelihood of being crushed).

Option C: Globalism, working for needed changes in our system of global governance to promote democracy and justice.

QUESTIONS:

1. *What kind of world will we pass on to our children if rich and/or poor nations fail to choose option C above?*

2. *Rather than waiting for World War III or some other global catastrophe to persuade us to institute major changes in our system of governance, how can we now marshal the necessary will to generate the momentum to do so?*

Utopia or "Workability?" *(p. 3)*

A perfect world is not attainable, but a "workable world" is. The book puts forward scores of detailed proposals for improving global governance through peaceful, evolutionary processes. The aim is not to create an unrealistic "utopia," but rather - to the extent practicable - to establish a world in which the force of law supplants the law of force, a world committed to justice and continuous, yet sustainable, development.

Questions of Design and Perspective *(p. 2, 5-8)*

One of the key ideas in the book is that the design of decision-making agencies contributes greatly to the quality and legitimacy of the decisions that they make. But, to put it mildly, there are many major problems with the way in which the UN was cobbled together by the great powers in 1945 and in the ways by which new global agencies have been added ever since. Throughout the UN system the principal units of decision-making are individual nations. But these vary enormously in population (*see figure 1.1 of book*), wealth, culture and political orientation, more so than within any individual nation. At the founding of the UN, the dominant perspective of the Charter was that of the powerful nations of the Western world (now seen as the "Global North"), but most members of the UN, by far, are nations of the "Global South."

QUESTIONS:

1. *Are the differences among members of the UN so great that it is unrealistic to try to find ways by which they can work together fairly and efficiently? Or should we scrap the entire system and begin again from the ground up? Why do you believe as you do?*

2. *Decisions – non-binding, except for those of the Security Council – are presently made on the basis of "one-nation-one-vote" irrespective of the differences in the power of the nations. Could some sort of weighted voting system(s) be devised to deal with this problem? How do you think this might this work?*

Rethinking Sovereignty

Despite the fact that the issues treated in the following discussion are accorded little space in the author's original work, they merit substantial thought and discussion to enable readers to better understand the context for other discussions throughout this Study Guide.

Article 2 of the UN Charter states: "*The Organization is based on the principle of the sovereign equality of all its Members.*" Steadfast adherence to this principle, especially by nations that are politically weak, has proved to be a major impediment to Charter reform. But is this seemingly simple principle, originating with the 1648 Peace of Westphalia -- following Europe's devastating Thirty Years War and subsequently diffused by colonial powers throughout the world -- still optimal for our complex and interdependent planet? Our answer is certainly "no."

In fact, the meaning of sovereignty has been and remains the subject of heated debate. Who, for example, should be the legitimate holders of sovereignty? In the 17th century, it was generally believed that monarchs ("sovereigns") ruled absolutely and by divine right. The American and French Revolutions, however, promoted the view that sovereignty belongs to the *people* and that all citizens were equal and entitled to equal rights. Of course, this lofty view differed – and still differs – from the current political reality. As a practical matter, the ability to exercise sovereignty (i.e., to govern) in most nations claiming to be democratic republics is constitutionally delegated to *legislators* – some appointed and some elected – who may or may not exercise their powers freely.

In most of the world's nations, sovereignty is held exclusively by the central government, even though local governments may be granted the revocable power to legislate on many matters. But in twenty nations, those with federal constitutions, sovereignty is *irrevocably* divided between the central government and the nation's constituent territorial units (states, provinces, cantons, etc.), each exercising constitutionally delegated power to legislate in regard to specified issues (foreign affairs, international trade, education, health, etc.). Many of the world's most powerful, populous, largest and/or diverse nations are federations: the USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Nigeria, Germany, Russia, India, Pakistan, Australia, etc. So, too, are several highly successful, but small, states, such as Switzerland. In total, federations account for 37% of the world's population, 46% of its GNI and 52% of its land area.

Whatever a nation's type of government may be – on a spectrum ranging from truly democratic to autocratic – the Westphalian system of

sovereignty conveys to that nation the right to govern exclusively over a specifically bounded area. Attempts by outside agencies, including those of the United Nations system, to legally abridge this right (among others) are almost always considered unacceptable. Nations zealously seek to preserve their *unfettered* sovereignty. While the Westphalian system, at times, worked more or less well, present-day threats to global security and sustainability make it necessary for us to reconsider adherence to the idea of unfettered national sovereignty in the contemporary world.

Although the Westphalian system *theoretically* empowers nations to control the flow of people, goods, services, money and ideas across their borders, in p*ractice* they do so rather poorly. Ways are almost always found to enable laundered money, migrants, black market merchandise, drugs, sex trafficking, propaganda, armaments, and other "bads" to evade government regulations. Additionally, behind-the-curtain influence peddling often enables agents of foreign governments and powerful and unscrupulous multi-national companies to influence national policies in profoundly undesirable ways.

QUESTIONS:

1. *Why do nations adhere so tenaciously to the outmoded Westphalian model of sovereignty?*

2. *Do you believe that the UN should have the power to enact binding legislation in regard to a select group of issues? If so, what should those subjects be and why? How and under what circumstances might the list of subjects be expanded? (This topic will be explored in Units 2 and 3.)*

3. *Should sovereign nations be subject to international jurisdiction and the imposition of punitive sanctions when activities within their borders (e.g., pollution of the atmosphere and groundwater) have serious adverse effects on other countries? If you answered yes, what might those sanctions be? (This topic will be discussed in Units 7 and 12.)*

4. *Could the federal model of shared sovereignty within nations such as the United States or India be applied at the global level, with a constitutional division of legislative and other governmental powers between a central world government and the governments of individual nations? (While the book does not discuss this question, it is one that all the world's citizens should be thinking about.)*