

STUDY AND DISCUSSION GUIDE

for

TRANSFORMING THE UNITED NATIONS SYSTEM: DESIGNS FOR A WORKABLE WORLD

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Unit 15: Getting There (p. 319-337)

Why Is This Important? (p. 319-320)

Although virtually everyone yearns to be free from the scourges of war, terrorism, poverty and eco-catastrophe, there is still far too little commitment to working for those causes. A widely-shared sense of urgency is lacking. Thus, we drift ever closer to collective disaster. This can and must be reversed. We must muster the requisite will, wisdom and cooperative spirit to do so. And we must do so soon!

Throughout the book, we have put forward scores of proposals for substantial reforms of the present system of global governance that we believe are needed to enable humankind to cope with the perils of an ever-more-interconnected and interdependent world. Humankind has no viable alternative other than to plan for the future. But no reform plan, however logical and meticulously presented it may be, will have much value unless it is endorsed by a critical mass of decision makers and engenders in them a will to engage in meaningful action. In this Unit of our Study Guide we note some basic obstacles to change and some ways by which those obstacles might be overcome.

Key Issues: (p. 320-334)

The Domestic Political Climate: Global and local politics are inevitably intertwined. Over much of the world, however, the importance of global politics is little acknowledged. In particular, the question that looms largest in many democratic elections is “What is best for *our country?*” rather than “What is best for *our shared planet?*” Enormously wealthy MNCs – especially those tied to the so-called “military-industrial complex” in the US and its equivalent in a small number of additional major powers – dominate the political system to an inordinate degree and have little regard for the potential role of the UN system. Financial interests dominate many key institutions. By and large, the media are complicit. Nationalism reigns.

The Educational System: Support for nationalism – mainly benign, but often jingoistic – also characterizes most educational systems. From their earliest school years, children are indoctrinated into unquestioning loyalty to the State. This is true in most democratic states as well as in autocracies such as North Korea. An ethos of loyalty to the Earth and all

of its people is generally lacking. Curricula underplay the history, geography and cultures of areas outside one's own country.

Civil Society: Although the number and influence of civil society organizations (CSOs) has increased by leaps and bounds during the past half-century, no way has yet been devised by which to efficiently integrate their wisdom and experience into our system of global governance. Additionally, civil society is still dominated by the global North and lacks democratic accountability.

Inertia and Sclerosis of the Present UN System: The inadequacies of the present UN system in responding to major global changes are notorious and not accidental. The Charter was written so as to make it difficult to amend, thereby preserving the stranglehold of the P-5 on the organization as a whole and foreclosing major structural reforms. The all-but-universal one-nation-one-vote method of decision-making is utterly unrealistic.

Lack of Coordination of Reform Initiatives: Given the difficulties cited above, it is hardly surprising that, over most of the world, initiatives to reform the UN system have gained little traction. Although small groups with a reform agenda may be found in a number of countries, especially in the global North, there are no widely respected leaders (other, arguably, than Pope Francis I) or NGOs forcefully making the case for an effectively reformed global governance system.

Possible Solutions (p. 320-334)

In the preceding paragraphs we have endeavored to present a candid reflection of the multiplicity and magnitude of the obstacles in the way of creating a workable world. Formidable though these obstacles are, we are convinced that fundamental reform is necessary and that failure to take timely action will exact an enormous toll in human suffering and environmental damage. There is no obvious place to begin. Nature, more than human agency, may determine our chief priorities. Catastrophes can force change. But why should we wait for the next catastrophe to make a start in putting our house in order? In response to the challenges noted above, we offer the following multipronged, long-term strategy for change:

Improving the domestic political and economic climate to facilitate working for reform: We must somehow create – or restore – a viable balance of concern for domestic and international politics and understand the links between the two. Citizens must reclaim political control from the

MNCs and oppose the military-industrial complex. Laws should enable the media to express unpopular political opinions without fear of retribution.

Establishing a system of global education and encouraging development of a cosmopolitan ethos: Schools must teach and nurture a *global ethos*, wherein all persons recognize themselves as members of a single human family, citizens of a common planetary home, and wards for the welfare of future generations. Educational systems must be substantively revised and deparochialized. The art of critical thinking needs to be cultivated. Opportunities for personally experiencing and learning from foreign cultures (including language mastery) should be greatly expanded.

Creating effective civil society networks: Effective networks of CSOs with related agendas must be forged and ways must be found whereby their collective voices and expertise can be given effective recognition (see the proposal for civil society coordinating councils in Chapter 10.) **The North-South gap in regard to the effectiveness of CSOs must be reasonably addressed.**

Key reforms of the UN system: Several key changes may serve as catalysts to set the engine of reform in motion. Devising a simple and reliable revenue-raising system can greatly enhance the capability of UN agencies and restore confidence in the UN as a whole. Establishment of a World Parliamentary Assembly should, over time, provide a forum for the voices of ordinary citizens and put pressure for reform on would-be democratic leaders. Adoption of realistic weighted voting in decision-making agencies should impart credibility and a sense of fairness to the decisions made. Creation of a UN Peace Corps should enable a reversal of the world's costly and fruitless military build-up.

Forging strategic alliances: Although CSOs will likely lead the way, they must enlist the support of forward-looking, well-regarded and highly trusted democratic nations from both the global North and the global South. They alone have the legal standing to put reform initiatives before the GA, SC, (proposed) WPA and other UN agencies. Enlisting regional organizations should also prove politically useful. Active support from Nobel laureates and other renowned senior statespersons (preferably retired), philosophers, scientists, religious leaders (and faith-based bodies) and other shapers of public opinion could prove invaluable.

QUESTIONS:

- 1. We have limited our list of “possible solutions” to five high-priority topics, though many others would have been possible. Do you agree with our selection? If not, what should we have added or deleted?***
- 2. If you were both pro-UN reform and a powerful shaper of public opinion, to which of our five areas for reform would you devote most of your attention? Why so?***
- 3. Is incremental change the preferable way to proceed, or is wholesale change necessary? What are the pros and cons of each approach?***
- 4. How might global demographic changes advance or impede UN reform efforts?***
- 5. Given the trends and periodic counter-trends in the world, as you see them, what do you believe to be a reasonable date for having in place some approximation of the “workable world” that we envisage?***
- 6. Suppose that there are certain countries that do not wish to take part in the reform process. Should the rest of the world go ahead without them, assuming or hoping that the hold-outs would eventually come aboard? If so, what, in your opinion, should be the critical mass needed to move forward? Why do you hold that opinion?***



The United Nations aims to promote the welfare of future generations as well as to deal with present problems

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our planet is a complex and interdependent organism.

Global problems require global solutions.

*The world is my country, all of mankind are my brethren,
and to do good is my religion. – Thomas Paine*

The law of force must yield to the force of law.

National sovereignty conveys responsibilities as well as rights.

*All human beings are created equal and
are endowed with unalienable human rights.*

Government should be of the people, by the people and for the people.

Enduring peace requires justice.

Justice requires binding and enforceable law.

Just law requires democratic government.

Therefore, enduring global peace requires democratic global government.

*Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible; but man's
inclination to injustice makes democracy necessary. – Reinhold Niebuhr*

*When seeking to change a long-established political system,
setbacks will be inevitable; but setbacks can be overcome.*

*The design of decision-making agencies affects the quality and legitimacy
of their decisions. Well-designed global systems should be compromises
that take into account the interests of diverse actors on the global stage.
This can be accomplished by means of realistic weighted voting formulae.*

*Although Utopia is beyond our reach,
we can create a workable, progressively better world.*

*It is not because it is difficult that we are afraid to act;
it is because we are afraid to act that it is difficult. – Seneca*

Where there's a will, there's a way.

*Henceforth, every nation's foreign policy must be judged at every point
by one consideration: does it lead us to a world of law and order
or does it lead us back to anarchy and death? – Albert Einstein*

Nothing is as powerful as an idea whose time has come. - Victor Hugo