

Chapter 21: The United Nations

- The United Nations was established to preserve peace among states after the Second World War.
- In a number of ways, the institutions of the United Nations reflected lessons learned from its predecessor, the League of Nations.
- The institutions and mechanisms of the United Nations reflect both the demands of great power politics (i.e. Security Council veto) and universalism. They also reflect demands to address the needs and interests of people, as well as the needs and interests of states. The tensions between these various demands are a key feature of UN development.
- There have been a number of disagreements over UN membership, and over the composition of the UN Security Council.
- The cold war and the decolonization process discouraged more active involvement by the United Nations within states.
- By the mid-1990s the UN had become involved in maintaining international peace and security by resisting aggression between states, attempting to resolve disputes within states (civil wars), and focusing on economic, social, and political conditions within states.
- The United Nations does not have a monopoly on peace operations. While the UN often provides legitimation, operations are sometimes conducted by regional organizations, ad hoc coalitions, or hybrid arrangements involving UN and non-UN actors, such as the African Union.
- The UN has paid increasing attention to peacebuilding and the gendered dimensions of peace and security, with a number of important reports and initiatives in these areas.
- Critics, however, point to severe shortcomings such as allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by some UN peacekeeping personnel.
- The cold war and the North–South divide led to differences in opinions over how best to address economic and social development.
- The number of institutions in the UN system that address economic and social issues has increased significantly. Several Programmes and Funds have been created in response to global conferences.
- Reform of the economic and social arrangements of the UN in the late 1990s aimed at improving coordination and clarifying spheres of responsibility.
- The MDGs consisted of measurable socio-economic targets and further integrated the work of the UN at the country level. They have been replaced by the SDGs, which are universally applicable to all countries.