

# Rethinking Global Governance and the UN's Founding

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Ironically, this essay emphasizes *history*, atypical for a political scientist, in elaborating a briefer argument that first appeared last autumn in the Global Governance Forum.<sup>1</sup> The starting point emanates from a reminder by University of Oxford's Andrew Hurrell that "relentless presentism" afflicts international relations (IR) scholarship, including those of us who are preoccupied with the present and (hopefully) future United Nations.<sup>2</sup> Too much of what we do involves extrapolations from yesterday; long-range planning extends only to the next public opinion poll or financial crisis. So, in 2020, when the world organization's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary provided an occasion to reflect seriously on the future of multilateralism, I felt compelled, then and now, to emphasize the past in preparing the world organization for what is an uncertain future.

My dotage has led me to become a back-of-the-envelope historian to help combat what is social science's inverse Alzheimer's disease: short-term memory is retained while the contexts that crafted memories have slipped away, if indeed we ever were sufficiently knowledgeable about those contexts in the first place. The current moment is especially zany; it fosters being out of breath and myopic. The world is reeling from advancing climate change, a still-untamed pandemic, and Russian aggression against the Ukraine. Despite the clear evidence of the terrifying shortfalls of state sovereignty for global problem-solving, the UN and multilateralism more generally are under siege from the new nationalists and populists worldwide. They appear totally unaware not only of what preceded 1945 at the UN's creation, but of much that has transpired since.

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<sup>1</sup> Weiss, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Hurrell, 2002), p. xiii.

A powerful insight comes from the late Quaker economist Kenneth Boulding: “We are where we are because we got there.”<sup>3</sup> This article seeks to understand *how* we got here, and a point of departure is the author’s personal confession about the ahistorical quality of too much of my own scholarship. One explanation—albeit not a justification—is the character of contemporary social science and international relations, for which a premium is paid for parsimony and the simplest causal theories, which preclude or at least downplay considerations of complexity. In addition, we feel compelled to say something pertinent about the headlines of the day. For academics, social media and electronic publications have exacerbated a kind of journalism jealousy, with the resulting tendency to react immediately with bullet points and visceral commentary and to be rewarded for same.

As such, history is problematic; it complicates matters and slows us down.<sup>4</sup> In trying to move beyond the “gee-whiz” character of too many conferences and seminars, I am heartened by the launching of this occasional paper series that has given me the opportunity to examine the UN’s crucial war-time foundations before fast-forwarding to the challenges of contemporary global governance theorizing and practice. Non-academic readers are asked to indulge the author; they can ignore the footnotes, which are intended to chart the underappreciated complexity of scholarship about global governance that underpins what I hope is an accessible argument.

## Wartime History

So, let’s begin at the beginning. The creation of the “United Nations” was not in San Francisco with the signing of the UN Charter on 26 June or its entry into force on 24 October 1945, but rather in Washington, DC, on 1 January 1942 when 26 (and later 44) Allies signed the “Declaration by United Nations.”<sup>5</sup> Most people are unaware of the label chosen for the military alliance to crush fascism. It also entailed a parallel commitment to multilateralism as the

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted by Elise Boulding in an interview with Thomas G. Weiss, quoted in Weiss et al., 2005, p. 301.

<sup>4</sup> Williams, Hadfield, and Rofe, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Plesch and Weiss, eds., 2015 and Plesch, 2011

alliance's standard operating procedure and, dare I say it, "vision" about post-war peace and prosperity with a distinct role for an institution that would bear the same name.

The year 2020 and the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the United Nations Charter should have, but did not, nudge member states toward the future, or at the very least to entertain the need and prospects for transformation or even serious change, including alterations in institutional architecture and the shape of partnerships with nonstate actors (both non-profit and for-profit). However, the argument here constitutes a "back to the future" perspective: it is essential to revisit the 1940s, which in many ways represented the pinnacle of global intergovernmental governance in an international system that already had plenty of interdependence and nonstate actors, the two primary factors that explain the development of the concept of *global governance*.

While anniversaries are artificial "hooks," they nonetheless provide a regular way to remember, or at least to try and not forget. Two years earlier had marked the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War I. That first was paradoxically followed by the second war to end all wars. Like the Napoleonic Wars, the 20<sup>th</sup> century's global armed conflicts led to experiments in international organization after rampant nationalism and going-it-alone were exposed as empty vessels for peace and prosperity. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine reminded us that inter-state war is not a relic of the past, even if armed conflict is no longer the only, or even the main, threat to international order. The growing list of intractable problems well beyond the power of states acting alone ranges from climate change and migration to terrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMDs)—and, of course, pandemics like COVID-19. There is no evidence that the existential threats from climate change or the pandemic or World War III with a spill-over from the Ukraine will lead to a similar 1815, 1918, or 1945 "moment." Today, it is unlikely that we could even secure state agreement to the UN Charter and the shaky rules-based system that we currently have.

Indeed, the ambitious, transnational, collaborative experiment of the European Union (EU) remains under duress from many sides despite their coming together in the face of the Ukraine crisis. In Washington, Paris, and elsewhere, the response to the Russian aggression means that for the moment NATO is apparently no longer quite “obsolete” (Donald Trump’s characterization) or “brain dead” (Emmanuel Macron’s). In the United States, the arrival of the Biden administration means that other international arrangements like the Paris Agreement, WHO and COVAX, the Human Rights Council, and the Iran P5+1 have been resuscitated although still on life support. Not for the first nor the last time, cooperative rhetoric outpaces concrete initiatives.

Few will be surprised when I point out the fundamental disparity between a growing number and intensity of global threats and the current inadequate structures for international problem-solving and decision-making. The international responses thus far to the looming threats of the pandemic and climate change have repeated a familiar pattern: occasional, tactical, and short-term local views and responses instead of sustained, strategic, and longer-run global perspectives and actions.

So why, pray tell, begin this essay by returning to the period 1942–1945? Quite simply, because almost no one questions the effort made by the United States and its Allies, not even the crews of the my-country-firsters worldwide. The history of the wartime United Nations contradicts the conventional wisdom that liberalism was abandoned to confront Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. In fact, Kantian ideals were found to be essential to Hobbesian state survival. The combined national decisions to collaborate and to design and then construct international organizations for peace and prosperity were central to the mobilization against and defeat of fascism. A genuine cooperative strategy motivated peoples, kept states allied, and won the war.

The United Nations from 1942 to 1945 is relevant for thinking about the future. Why? Because when governments decide to rely on multilateral collaboration or intergovernmental structures, they work. The wartime actions by the UN’s founders suggest that our current shriveled imaginations result in notions of contemporary global governance that often are a second-best surrogate for,

among other things, more robust multilateralism. Indeed, Augusto Lopez-Claros, Arthur L. Dahl, and Maja Groff challenge us “to make the intellectual effort to overcome the blockage of diminished expectations for global governance, and to map possible ways forward.”<sup>6</sup>

If global problems require global solutions, the history of confronting life-threatening challenges points toward strengthened intergovernmental organizations, especially those of the UN system. The proposition of global solutions flies in the face of the infatuation with problem-solving by anything other than intergovernmental organizations. Almost two decades ago in her book *A New World Order*, Anne-Marie Slaughter viewed networks of various types rather than organizations as the key to problem-solving.<sup>7</sup> Afterwards, Dan Drezner in a *Foreign Policy* blog and Stewart Patrick in *Foreign Affairs* proposed living with the sum of alternative arrangements and downplayed or dismissed the universal-membership United Nations as hopeless and hapless.<sup>8</sup> Apparently, we can only aspire to a variegated institutional sprawl—or what they dubbed “good-enough global governance.”

Alas, that is not and will not be adequate without a revitalized United Nations as an integral component of international society. Skeptics are justified in questioning UN performance and potential. As if further evidence were required, we are still suffering the daily reminder of the demonstrated poverty of the Security Council’s outdated structure to address the illegal, unprovoked Russian war against Ukraine. While much of my own research over the last half-century details the world organization’s shortcomings and misbehavior, we are kidding ourselves about the potential for mini-lateralism or loosely knit networks to accomplish what only more robust intergovernmental organizations could achieve. To cite an article written with a colleague on the UN’s 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary, “good-enough global governance ain’t good enough.”<sup>9</sup> That ungrammatical sentence remains an apt summary later this year for the

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<sup>6</sup> Lopez-Claros, Dahl and Groff, 2020), p. xi.

<sup>7</sup> Slaughter, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Drezner, 2013; Patrick, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Plesch and Weiss, 2015, pp. 197–204.

77<sup>th</sup> and forthcoming UN anniversaries, which provides the segue way to the next section of this occasional paper and the first part of its title.

## Re-imagining Global Governance

I have destroyed my share of trees struggling to get into the public domain the evolving notion of “global governance.” Most of that work was in collaboration with Rorden Wilkinson, most recently in our 2022 edited *Global Governance Futures* and the forthcoming third edition of *International Organization and Global Governance*.<sup>10</sup>

One way to imagine the global governance of the future is to start with the global governance of today. Yet, we lack any clear understanding about the meaning of the concept and consensus about what it could and should be. For some, global governance is old wine in new bottles—an alternative expression for the actions and activities of international organizations. For others, it is a descriptor for a global stage packed with ever more actors; a call to arms for a better world; and an attempt to control the pernicious aspects of accelerating economic and social change. For still others, it is a synonym for world government, sometimes used pejoratively to condemn a Leviathan or a hegemonic plot to advance the interests of a murky global elite.

I would like to enumerate the eight shortcomings in conventional understandings of global governance that we need to overcome because they inhibit our capacity to re-imagine a more adequate version to guide future efforts that can address global challenges, the primary purpose of the Global Governance Forum. First, however, we need to revisit the genesis of the term. So, let’s begin with the puzzle that spawned the concept, namely, how is the world governed *in the absence* of a world government? Both friends and foes of international cooperation need to explain why a certain amount, not enough to be sure, of order, stability, and predictability exists, despite the lack of any overarching authority to address the planet’s problems.

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<sup>10</sup> This section draws on Weiss and Wilkinson, 2022a, pp. 1–19.

On any given day, in virtually every corner of the world, exchanges take place smoothly, in fact, without comment. For instance, mail is delivered for 200 countries. Before and presumably after the pandemic, travelers arrived at and will again arrive at airports, harbors, and train stations and by road—many of them crossing borders virtually unnoticed. Goods and services moved and will move by land, air, sea, and cyberspace. A range of transboundary activities occurred and will take place with the expectation of safety and security. In fact, disruptions and failures were and remain less frequent and noteworthy in the international arena than *within* such countries as Somalia, Afghanistan, Zimbabwe, and Syria, which supposedly have functioning central governments.

The fact that largely unseen economic, political, technological, and other structures enable the provision of some global public goods is striking. Moreover, there are even more remarkable non-events that go unnoticed, including that no children are dying from smallpox, and no nuclear weapons have been detonated in war since those in Japan in August 1945. Charles Dickens's description of the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* is apt for our era: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness."

The proverbial Martians, landing in most parts of the planet could thus observe many smooth international transactions and affirm that the world can be governed.<sup>11</sup> Yet, we along with our extraterrestrial visitors should ask, "Can it be *better* governed?" Or more precisely, how can we better confront the problems that threaten human survival with dignity?

Our predecessors on planet Earth waffled on these questions, but we cannot. In an intellectual struggle to formulate an adequate response, a growing number of us have applied the analytical lenses of "global governance."<sup>12</sup> Let

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<sup>11</sup> Mazower, 2012; and Avant et al., 2010. The author's own reply is in Weiss, 2014.

<sup>12</sup> The author has learned much from his collaboration with two friends and colleagues on other books that inform this discussion and are good places to continue reading: See Weiss and Thakur, 2010; and Weiss and Wilkinson, eds., 2023 (forthcoming). Interested readers are also referred to *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, the quarterly journal published since 1994.

me state my own definition: the sum of the informal and formal ideas, values, rules, norms, procedures, practices, policies, and institutions that help all actors—be they states, intergovernmental organizations (IGOs), civil society and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), transnational corporations (TNCs), and individuals—identify, understand, and address transboundary problems.

The term “global governance” itself emerged from a shot-gun marriage between academics and policy analysts after a series of crises beginning in the 1970s and accelerating in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Those responses sought to understand the forces at play on the world stage that had led to the end of the Cold War. Early explorations also sought to identify and enhance the prospects for a better world order after a half-century in which East-West rivalry had crowded out many progressive, global, public policy initiatives. Also, relevant efforts were made to understand the transformative potential of grass-roots resistance and civil society movements<sup>13</sup> and to think through how feminist analyses could be brought to bear for a subject where they had previously found little traction. Moreover, global governance was a concept imbued with possibility, one that was expressly concerned with understanding change, complexity, and alternative futures. But it was also born from a very specific moment in time and, as a result, has shortcomings.

In their pioneering 1992 collection *Governance without Government*, James Rosenau and Ernst Czempiel charted a path for thinking about how the world was ordered in the post-Cold War period. They chose to focus not only on the state and its intergovernmental entanglements but also hidden, in-between, the emerging and non-state sources of problem-solving and authority. Elsewhere, the policy-oriented Commission on Global Governance, led by Sonny Ramphal and Ingmar Carlsson, focused on the normative possibilities of the newly emerging world order. At the same time, other researchers were thinking about the future world order under the auspices of the “Multilateralism and the United Nations System” (MUNS), a project coordinated by Robert W.

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<sup>13</sup> See, for example, Ayoob, 1995; Prügl, 1996), pp.15–24; Meyer and Prügl, eds., 1999; Gordenker, 1995, pp. 357–88; O'Brien et al., 2000.



Cox and sponsored by the United Nations University (UNU).<sup>14</sup> Indeed, a proliferation of works emerged in short order which shone light on the possibilities and prospects for alternative world orders.<sup>15</sup> By the time of the 1995 publication of the commission's report, *Our Global Neighbourhood*, the term "global governance" already had gained considerable traction and was used in academic and policy circles; the same year also witnessed the first issue of the journal *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organization*, a joint undertaking of the Academic Council on the United Nations System and the UNU.

These early publications paved the way for a raft of works about growing global complexity, the management of globalization, and the challenges confronting international institutions.<sup>16</sup> What they did not do, however, was to settle on a common understanding or a clear path for inquiry. Ambiguity was a design feature of early thinking about global governance, as scholars sought to understand the changing dynamics of global politics in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War. In 1995, in one of the first articles in the new journal, Lawrence Finkelstein, who had been in San Francisco, asked pertinently "what is global governance?" He lamented his own puzzling answer: "virtually anything."<sup>17</sup>

Cox and his colleagues were mainly concerned with multilateralism, but they left open the possibility that global governance could, and would, take many and varied forms. This, in turn, opened the way for thinking about the concept over time, by focusing on how world orders were managed and arranged in different eras.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Sakamoto, ed., 1992; Krause and Knight, eds., 1995; Cox, ed., 1997; Gill, ed., 1997; Schechter, ed., 1999a and 1999b. See, also, Ruggie, ed., 1993; Wilkinson, 2000; and Newman et al., 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Goldblatt, et al. 1999; Hewson and Sinclair, eds., 1999.

<sup>16</sup> Prakash and Hart, eds., 1999; Held and McGrew, eds., 2002; and Cox, 1994, pp. 99–113.

<sup>17</sup> Finkelstein, 1995, p. 368.

<sup>18</sup> Weiss and Wilkinson, 2019.

As the notion of global governance gained traction both in and beyond the academy, subtle changes in conceptualization emerged. Some were driven by scholars adapting understandings of global governance to account for important earlier work that no longer captured the attention of a new generation; for example, the World Order Models Project (WOMP).<sup>19</sup> As Joseph Barrata observed, during the 1990s “the new expression, ‘global governance,’ emerged as an acceptable term in debate on international organization for the desired and practical goal of progressive efforts, in place of ‘world government.’”<sup>20</sup> A decade after the expression had come into widespread use, Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall wrote that, “The idea of global governance has attained near-celebrity status.”<sup>21</sup> In a more recent scholarly inquiry, Michael Zürn calculated that the term had become more frequent in searches than “peace and war” and surpasses all other IR terms in its growth rate.<sup>22</sup>

The growth in this cottage industry was not without problems. Global governance moved away from broad-based and ambitious efforts to appreciate complexity, change, and possibility on a worldwide scale. It gravitated toward a far narrower focus on collective efforts to identify, comprehend, and address problems and processes that went beyond the capacities of individual states in the post-Cold War period. As a result, global governance became overly and closely associated with the capacity of and the desire for intergovernmental arrangements—sometimes working hand-in-glove with non-governmental actors, sometimes not. Debates became fixated between supporters and detractors of international institutions in fields ranging from health and conflict prevention to trade and development. In short, global governance became a proxy descriptor, whose meaning had become narrower as its usage increased. The result was to dull the edges of its analytical utility.

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<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Falk and Mendlovitz, eds., 1966–67); Clark and Sohn, 1958.

<sup>20</sup> Barrata, 2004, quote from vol. 2, 534–5.

<sup>21</sup> Barnett and Duvall, eds., 2005), p.1.

<sup>22</sup> Zürn, 2018), pp. 262–3.

Another, darker turn also emerged. Conspiratorial forces chose to interweave the term with discourse about global elites and cabals, with little basis in fact and often with highly racialized overtones, as was much in evidence in some proclamations by those who stormed the US Capitol on 6 January 2021. The result was that in a few short decades, global governance had shifted from a genuine and ambitious attempt to understand and affect the changing map of authority worldwide into a new way of talking about international organization and, to a lesser extent, conspiracy theories in the post-Cold War era.

Do these debates matter? On the one hand, international institutions and intergovernmental cooperation do matter. Moreover, many students are interested in classes on international organization because they are fascinated by these institutionalized sites of discord and collaboration, often hoping to embark on careers in international public service. As we think about the future, it is essential not to ignore the experiments of the last century and a half, and to learn lessons from their successes and failures.<sup>23</sup>

On the other hand, such narrow understandings reduce the analytical utility of global governance, diminish its power to imagine better futures and to prescribe actions. They stifle the capacity to ask broader questions about how world order is governed—in the past, now, and in the future. To focus only on burgeoning intergovernmentalism at the turn of the 20th century would, for instance, fail to do more than glance briefly at the significant role of imperialism, social Darwinism, and industrialization in earlier systems of global governance.

In short, global governance must move beyond a too circumscribed association with international organization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In fact, the complexities of the post-Cold War era, and whatever label we will assign eventually to the current one, are concrete expressions of global governance at this moment. However, earlier formations were different,

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<sup>23</sup> Lavelle, 2020.

just as future ones will be,<sup>24</sup> and are driven by ideas, interests, and forces that vary and evolve.<sup>25</sup>

To be useful, enquiries into global governance should identify and explain the often-contested structures of global authority in play at any moment.<sup>26</sup> For instance, how do they address existential threats such as climate change, gross inequalities in incomes and access to health care, and corruption. More generally, however, global governance analyses should also account not only for grand patterns of command and control, but also for how regional, national, and local systems intersect with and push against world structures. They should investigate the myriad ways that power is exercised, how interests are articulated and pursued, and the kinds of ideas from which power and interests draw substance, as well as those which help to establish, maintain, and perpetuate the system. They should account for fewer and more substantial changes *in* and *of* the system and probe the causes, consequences, and drivers of change and continuity, not only today, but over extended periods in the past and into the future. And, crucially, they should account for the positive and negative outcomes of systems of governance at all levels.

At that point, we should be better able to understand “global governance as it has been, is, and may become,”<sup>27</sup> or what John Ruggie once described as “how the world hangs together.”<sup>28</sup> That better framing should also permit us to formulate better strategies and policies for a world—still in the midst of a pandemic, threatened daily with climate-induced weather turbulence, and a global economy in retreat even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine—that could be described as hanging together, but barely, by a thread.

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<sup>24</sup> For one contemporary view of continuity and change see Mahbubani, 2020, pp. 143–6.

<sup>25</sup> Jolly et al. 2005; Gill, 2002, pp. 47–65; and Finnemore and Sikkink, 1998, pp. 887–917.

<sup>26</sup> Shepherd, 2008, pp. 383–404; and Makdisi and Hindawi, 2017, pp.1691–1709.

<sup>27</sup> Hewson and Sinclair, 1999, p. ix.

<sup>28</sup> Ruggie, 1998, p. 2.

What is required to realize the analytical potential of global governance? The first part of the answer is to tackle global complexity in a satisfactory fashion, not to be afraid to disaggregate by issue and by context, and then to try to fit what we find back together into a better explanatory whole. We should not only describe who the principal actors are, and how they connect to one another, but also the outcomes that have resulted, why and on what grounds authority is effectively or poorly exercised, and who and what has been lost, badly affected, or excluded. We should examine the consequences of new forms of organization and determine what adjustments might enhance their utility to meet existing, new, or changing objectives. Important as well are subtler understandings and a better appreciation of the differing characteristics of actors, institutions, and governance machineries and their significance, when those with varying natures and capabilities come together or clash.

We should also give greater prominence to the way in which power of various types is exercised and manipulated. State capabilities matter, but so too does the way that formal and informal institutions mediate relations between states, and the way that goods and services are exchanged and managed. Questions of power are far less straightforward than in the theories of international relations specialists, because as the numbers and kinds of actors proliferate, states exert diminishing control over markets, and complex relations exist among various actors and markets. For instance, we should probe beyond the relationship between the current system of global governance and the preponderant US power that gave birth to it; and we should look beyond Washington's role in the creation of the first and second generations of universal intergovernmental bodies. We should also reflect on institutional expressions and social groups, epistemic communities and policy networks, financial decision-making, and changing capabilities among myriad other actors.<sup>29</sup>

Another task is to understand more fully the ideas and interests that drive existing machineries of governance—how they arose and developed, and how

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<sup>29</sup> Haas, 1992, pp. 1–35; Stone, 2012, pp. 339–54; and Helleiner and Pagliari 2011, pp. 169–200.

they subsequently permeated and modified the international system at all levels. Here, ideas themselves are essential, as are the value systems upon which they rest and which they inform, the discourses in which they are embedded, the interests to which they speak, and other elements of symbolic power of which they are a part. So too are the entrepreneurs and despots who generate ideas, the networks through which they are disseminated, the ways in which various institutions mediate core messages, and the processes through which they are translated into forms of organization and policy delivery.

Drawing on the previous analysis, let me conclude with the promised bullet-point summary of the eight problems that are baked into the current and predominant understandings of global governance. They impede our comprehension of the governance of today, as well as of the past and future. If we are persuaded that the existing array of global institutions is seriously flawed and in desperate need of serious overhaul, we cannot afford to have previous inadequate thinking about global governance condemn the future application of the concept because of current inadequacies. Those shortcomings can be summarized as follows:

1. Most crucially, there is an overly strong association between global governance and the problems and possibilities of international organization in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. If the planet is at a turning point, how do we design institutions to face overwhelming new problems, or at least the simultaneous occurrence of old problems that make for such a quantitative increase as to constitute qualitative new challenges?
2. There exists too little comprehensive identification and explanation of the structures of global authority that account not only for grand patterns of command and control, but also for how regional, national, and local systems intersect with, and have an impact on, transnational structures.
3. Ignorance is widespread about the myriad ways in which power is exercised within such a system, about how interests are articulated and pursued, and about the ideas and discourses from which power

- and interests not only draw substance, but also help to establish, maintain, and perpetuate the system.
4. There are misunderstandings of what propels modest changes *in* systems of global governance, versus substantial transformations *of* those same systems. There is an accompanying need to focus on the causes, consequences, and drivers of continuity and change—not only today, but over extended periods in the past and which could and should drive change in the future.
  5. There appears a perplexing unwillingness to ask questions about systems and instances of global governance through time. Answers to those questions would be helpful in exploring the mechanisms, institutions, rules, norms, ideas, interests, and material capabilities that have governed world orders in times long before our own, as well as in the future.
  6. In a related way, there is an unquestioned assumption that the “global” before the word “governance” necessarily implies “planetary.” This approach risks ignoring the forces in the governance, for example, of the Silk Road, the Roman and Ottoman Empires, and more recent colonial regimes—among many others—and the indelible marks left by those systems on the governance of today’s and tomorrow’s world orders.
  7. There is too little appreciation of the outputs of the global governance equation—what is produced, the effects that are generated, the impact of systems and expressions of global governance on the everyday lives of the “globally governed,” and the feedback loops that exist between aspects of global governance and those whose lives are affected by it. They include sex workers in Tijuana, Myanmar’s refugees in Bangladesh and New Jersey homeowners whose mortgages were under water after the 2008 financial meltdown.
  8. Finally, there is a neglect of those directly and indirectly involved in the formulation of global governance, not just those identified as “global governors” on the top of the food chain, but also the professionals, service teams, and individuals at work behind the

scenes, whose combined activities contribute to creating, sustaining, disrupting, and dismantling world orders—the “missing middle.”<sup>30</sup>

## Conclusion

My effort in these pages to draw upon the past in looking to the UN headed toward 100 leads me to end with two quotes, one that is historically informed and another that is anything but. The first is the often cited but still powerful remark attributed to Dag Hammarskjöld: “The UN was not created to take humanity to heaven, but to save it from hell.” One of the main reasons that we are not in Hammarskjöld’s netherworld already are the numerous ideational and operational contributions by the various members of the UN system. Yet, a world without them is not hard to imagine if current political conditions continue or deteriorate.<sup>31</sup>

“We are calling for a great reawakening of nations,” is how the former reality-TV host Donald Trump concluded his first performance at the General Assembly in 2017. He was ignorant that the United States and the Allies had created the UN system, amidst the ashes of a world war, precisely to curb the demonstrated horrors of nationalism run amok. Lately we have witnessed the destructive implications of Vladimir Putin’s application of a similar logic in Russia’s effort to recolonize Ukraine. While Trump, Putin, Xi, and other new nationalists in copious supply throughout the North and Global South will not do so, the rest of us should be calling for a great reawakening of the United Nations.

It is worth pondering the reflection of Australia’s former prime minister Kevin Rudd: “If the UN one day disappears, or more likely just slides into neglect, it is only then that we would become fully aware of the gaping hole this would leave in what remained of the post-war order.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, given the current disarray in world order, the most urgent priority is to reinforce the crumbling

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<sup>30</sup> Weiss and Wilkinson, 2022b, pp. 11–34.

<sup>31</sup> Weiss, 2018.

<sup>32</sup> Rudd, 2016.



foundations of the existing UN system.<sup>33</sup> That restoration effort is essential because we must do more than hope for serendipity to come up with solutions from the fleeting public spiritedness of political leaders or the best efforts from norm entrepreneurs, activists crossing borders, profit-seeking corporations, and transnational social networks. While such nonstate actors provide essential inputs and energy, a global tea party will not do the trick.

At present, the world organization is largely an after-thought, if a thought at all, for most governments and even for many activists. UN Secretary-General António Guterres described 1945 and 2021 in similar terms, as “wake-up calls.”<sup>34</sup> The challenge is revisiting the UN’s wartime origins, while simultaneously re-imagining a more networked and multi-partnered web of global governance—including its temporal and spatial dimensions as well as its impact on the globally governed with inputs from the missing middle. My hope is to understand better the possibilities, prospects, and pitfalls, not only in today’s, but also tomorrow’s world order.

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<sup>33</sup> This is the dominant theme in *Together First: How to Save the World: Ten Lessons from the History of Global Governance Reform*, 2019; “Together First” is a network of global citizens, civil society organizations, practitioners, parliamentarians, business leaders and activists from all regions of the world committed to fair, open and inclusive solutions to improve global governance.

<sup>34</sup> António Guterres, *Our Common Agenda: Report of the Secretary-General* (New York: UN, 2021), 12.

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