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Strengthening the Foundation for World Peace - A Case for Democratizing the United Nations

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STRENGTHENING THE FOUNDATION FOR WORLD PEACE:
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A significant barrier to the achievement of world peace is the lack of global consensus with regard to how political legitimacy should be valued. The world has a broad diversity of political systems – most notably democracies, authoritarian states and monarchies – that each value political legitimacy differently. The differences in how each of these political systems value political legitimacy manifest themselves in the differing criteria used in determining how the power to govern is granted. Democratic systems of government, in comparison to other political systems, rely upon elections as the means to determine how the power to govern is granted and are relatively more effective, in the long run, because of their accountability to the people. Further, democratic systems of government, through their reliance on rational-legal forms of political legitimacy, create forums for disputes to be resolved without resort to the use of force. The objective of this treatise is to show how the democratization of the United Nations would increase its effectiveness as a transnational governmental institution, harmonize how different political systems value political legitimacy and promote the diffusion of democratic culture in a manner that minimizes conflict with existing political hegemonies.

Achieving world peace will require the global harmonization of political systems to recognize each individual’s right to self-determination. The democratization of the United Nations would create a mechanism to harmonize the political systems of the world in a manner that promotes the development of democratic culture in peaceful co-existence with existing political hegemonies. Part I discusses the varying sources of political legitimacy and provides support for why political systems should be harmonized to adopt democratic norms as the basis of their political legitimacy. Because democratic institutions promote efficiency in political systems by using the electoral process to create a feedback system that refines governmental outputs to respond to changes in voting by the electorate,
it is argued that political systems should be harmonized to rely upon democratic processes as the globally recognized source of political legitimacy in order to maximize efficiency over the long run. Part II discusses how the democratization of transnational governmental entities would enable democratic culture to be peacefully introduced into societies that lack democratic institutions without directly displacing the political hegemonies that govern such non-democratic societies. It is argued that the achievement of a sustainable world peace requires the development of a global democratic culture that is formed organically, by peaceful consent, and not politically, through force. Part III applies the theoretical framework to the structure of the United Nations and argues that, in the long run, democratizing the United Nations would enhance the effectiveness of the organization, facilitate the diffusion of democratic culture without the use of force and would enable the harmonization of political systems throughout the world to recognize each individual’s right to self-determination.

I. Political Legitimacy and the Relative Value of Democratic Culture

At the heart of every political system lies an assumption of what constitutes the source of legitimacy upon which a governmental entity relies to exercise rightful authority over the governed. Max Weber, a German sociologist and political economist, theorized that political legitimacy is derived from one of three main sources: tradition, charismatic authority and rational-legal institutions.\(^1\) Traditional legitimacy derives from societal custom and habit that emphasize the history of the authority of tradition.\(^2\) An example of political systems that derive legitimacy from tradition are monarchies. Political systems that derive the authority to govern from tradition are justified by the belief that maintaining continuity in political practices are necessary in order to ensure the stability and prosperity of society as a whole. In contrast, political systems that derive legitimacy from charismatic

\(^1\) PATRICK H. O’NEIL, ESSENTIALS OF COMPARATIVE POLITICS 35–38 (2010).
\(^2\) See id.
authority are largely reliant upon the character, reputation and personal qualities of the sovereign leader, a man or woman whose importance within a particular culture is significant enough to warrant the grant of authority to rule a society.\(^3\) A government legitimized by charismatic authority derives authority from the persona of the sovereign leader, which in such systems trumps tradition and transcends the rule of law. Political systems that derive the authority to govern from charismatic authority are justified by the belief that the greatness of the sovereign leader would ensure the stability and prosperity of the society as a whole. Lastly, political systems that derive legitimacy from rational-legal institutions are based upon institutional procedure, wherein institutions founded upon the rule of law govern as agents of the public.\(^4\) Political systems that derive the authority to govern from rational-legal institutions are justified by the belief that ordering political practices under the rule of law would ensure the stability and prosperity of the society as a whole because of social contractarianism.

All three forms of political legitimacy are employed in varying degrees as the accepted source of authority in political systems across the world. The fragmentation in how different political systems conceive of legitimacy creates friction between societies that employ incongruent political systems, since each such political system, as structured by its source of legitimacy, is the manifestation of different sets of cultural values and assumptions that may be incompatible with the values and assumptions inherent within other political systems. The achievement of a sustainable world peace requires the harmonization of political systems so that each political system operates from the same set of assumptions and beliefs. Without such harmonization, the inherent tension between incongruent political systems that operate from conflicting value systems renders the achievement of world peace untenable because the fundamental disagreement as to how the exercise of authority is legitimized

\(^3\) See id.
\(^4\) See id.
inhibits the formation of a consensus as to how to resolve issues that may be hotly contested. In such circumstances, societies with incongruent political systems would be unable to agree upon the appropriate mechanism to resolve disputes because the fundamental disagreement as to what constitutes a legitimate source of authority precludes agreement upon the selection of a universally accepted arbitrator.

John Locke, an English social theorist, once stated that “government is not legitimate unless it is carried on with the consent of the governed.” Purely democratic political systems rely upon popular suffrage as the source of legitimacy, which directly tethers the composition of members of government to the changing consents of the governed. In theory, the result is a form of government that is designed to generate a feedback system through which inputs received from the electorate, typically but not exclusively in the form of votes, causes political actors to refine governmental outputs to reflect the directives contained in such changing inputs. The dynamism that characterizes the governing set of inputs in democratic political systems starkly contrasts with the relatively static set of inputs that characterize other political systems. Political systems whose legitimacy is rooted in tradition derive their inputs from a fixed set of cultural practices and values, which are the product of historical factors and are heavily resistant to change. Political systems whose legitimacy is justified by charismatic authority derive their inputs from the directives of the sovereign leader, which are more limited in scope compared to democratic political systems. Though imperfect, democratic political systems tend to be more efficient, in the long run, than non-democratic political systems because the broader and more diverse set of inputs, as well as institutional mechanisms for the adjustment of public policy to reflect any changes in such inputs, enable democratic political systems to adapt more rapidly to

changing circumstances than non-democratic political systems, which have more static sets of inputs and more rigid political and institutional structures resistant to changes in public policy.

Generally, transnational governmental entities constitute a distinct institutional layer that is separate from that of national governmental bodies, which retain their own sovereignty. The source of political legitimacy for most such transnational governmental entities is completely derived from powers delegated to them by the consent of sovereign national governments. Political actors within most transnational governmental entities are appointed by sovereign national governments and are not democratically elected. Democratically electing political actors within transnational governmental bodies would operate to shift the source of political legitimacy of transnational governmental entities away from sovereign national governments. Instead, the source of political legitimacy of such transnational governmental organizations would then be derived directly from popular suffrage, which would create a mechanism by which political actors within such transnational governmental bodies would be held directly accountable to the electorate through elections. By instituting democratic processes to determine the composition of transnational governmental organizations, it would harmonize the manner in which political actors in such transnational governmental organizations obtain political legitimacy with the manner in which political actors in national democratic political systems similarly obtain the right to govern, which creates a foundation for achieving consensus as to what should constitute the accepted form of political legitimacy in political systems throughout the world.

The democratization of transnational governmental entities would strengthen their political authority and improve their efficacy. By operating as a principal in political affairs, as opposed to operating as an agent of national governments, the independent authority of democratically elected transnational governmental organizations would be strengthened because it would be supported by a
mandate granted by power that is obtained directly from the consent of the electorate. The political legitimacy of such transnational governmental organizations would no longer be obtained from a secondary delegation of authority arising from the penumbra of powers exercised by national governments. If democratically elected, political actors in transnational governmental entities would not be directly accountable to national governments, but rather, would be held accountable to the electorate through elections. Further, the increase in the independence of transnational governmental entities through democratization would also have a positive correlative influence on their organizational efficacy because it would create a global political feedback system through which a diverse set of inputs received from a worldwide electorate would cause political actors within transnational governmental bodies to refine governmental outputs to reflect the directives contained within such inputs. Instituting democratic processes to shift the manner in which political actors in transnational governmental organizations obtain the authority to govern would incentivize such political actors to be more responsive to the directives of the electorate and would give the people greater influence over global affairs.

II. Harmonization of Political Systems and the Diffusion of Democratic Culture

Harmonization of political systems to create a standard for how to value political legitimacy is a precondition for achieving a sustainable world peace because the successful arbitration of disputes between sovereign parties requires agreement upon what qualifies as the globally recognized source of political legitimacy for such arbitration to be universally accepted as binding. Further, because democratic political systems tend to be more efficient in the long run than non-democratic political systems by virtue of the system of accountability built into such systems and the broader set of inputs informing the governmental decision-making process, harmonization of political systems to adopt a conception of political legitimacy whose source of authority is based upon democratic principles
supported by rational-legal political institutions would maximize the effectiveness of such political systems and would render the use of violence as a means to resolve disputes obsolete. Such harmonization is achievable by structuring transnational governmental entities in a manner that enables the peaceful transmission of democratic culture to non-democratic societies without radically destabilizing hegemonic political practices or directly infringing upon the sovereignty of such non-democratic nations.

Harmonizing the manner in which different political systems value political legitimacy in order to promote the diffusion of democratic culture requires an understanding of how new cultures are formed. The process of cultural formation manifests itself in three distinct ways. First are “native” cultures, which are defined herein as those cultures that do not primarily originate from a pre-existing outside cultural source and that arise spontaneously. Native cultures may develop out of a particular geographic region or on the basis of commonality, but they generally develop independently from outside cultural sources. Second are “organic” cultures, which are defined herein as those cultures that arise through peaceful contact by and between two or more cultures. Organic cultures are the product of a synthesis of cultures by which the practices and norms of an outside cultural source are incorporated into and accepted by a culture as a result of exposure. Exposure sufficient to create organic cultures includes, but is not limited to, cultural transmission through mass media, the commodification of cultural goods and practices and the creation of transcultural institutions. Third are “political” cultures, which are defined herein as those cultures that arise when the cultural values of an outside cultural source are imposed by force upon another culture. Political cultures are the product of the establishment of cultural institutions under which the practices and norms of an outside cultural source are established in, but are resisted by, a culture whose cultural values are displaced without the consent
of members of the dominated culture. Political cultures are characterized by tension, and sometimes violence, as different cultural values vie for dominance within a society.

Given that the voluntary acceptance of democratic culture within a society is a necessary requirement for the ongoing sustainability of democratic institutions, the diffusion of democratic culture through “organic” means increases the likelihood that the establishment of democratic institutions within non-democratic societies would be accepted by such societies without significant resistance or the threat of violence. Through voluntary acceptance of democratic culture by societies governed by non-democratic political systems, the likelihood that democratic institutions in such societies could be created and sustained would be increased because the establishment of such institutions would be supported by the consent of the electorate and would not be imposed through the use of force. In contrast, the imposition of democratic culture in non-democratic societies by radically de-stabilizing hegemonic political practices and directly infringing upon the sovereignty of such non-democratic nation states through the use of force would decrease the likelihood that democratic institutions in such societies could be created and sustained because the consent to govern would not have been obtained. In such cases, resistance to the establishment of democratic institutions creates the ongoing risk of regression to pre-existing non-democratic political norms and undermines the effectiveness of such institutions.

By democratizing transnational governmental organizations and holding elections in societies that lack democratic institutions which do not displace existing political hegemonies, democratic political practices would be layered upon non-democratic political practices already in existence. It would create a new channel of cultural distribution through which democratic institutions could be established in non-democratic societies without directly disturbing, supplanting or displacing the political hegemonies already entrenched in such non-democratic societies. Avoiding direct conflict
with pre-existing political hegemonies is necessary in order to facilitate a peaceful transition from a non-democratic political system to a political system legitimized by democratic institutions. The harmonization of political systems accomplished through the peaceful diffusion of democratic culture and the acceptance of democratic norms encourages the development of a global democratic culture that is formed organically, by peaceful consent, and not politically, through force, which is a pre-requisite for achieving a manifestation of world peace that is both sustainable and responsive to changing conditions in the world.

III. Application – The Case for the Democratization of the United Nations

The United Nations is an international organization committed to maintaining international peace and security, developing friendly relations among nations and promoting social progress, better living standards and human rights. Historically, the United Nations has taken action on a wide range of issues, and provides a forum for its member states to express their views and harmonize their actions, through the General Assembly, the Security Council, the Economic and Social Council and other bodies and committees. The mission of the United Nations is to keep peace throughout the world, develop friendly relations among nations, help nations work together to improve the lives of poor people, conquer hunger, disease and illiteracy and to encourage respect for each individual’s rights and freedoms. The democratization of the United Nations would enhance this mission significantly and with minimal reform.

By harmonizing how political legitimacy is valued between different political systems, the democratization of the United Nations would help to maintain peace throughout the world and facilitate

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7 See id.
8 See id.
the development of friendly relations among nations by creating an objective mechanism to determine globally accepted standards to resolve disputes without force. Since such standards would be formulated by political actors whose source of authority is derived directly from election by the people and not from appointment by nation states, such standards are more likely to be representative of the values of the global electorate and not merely reflective of the self-interests of individual nation states.

Holding political actors accountable by way of elections would incentivize political actors to refine governmental outputs to correlate with changes in directives received from the electorate. Further, by holding elections in member states that are governed by non-democratic political systems, it would provide individuals in such non-democratic societies an outlet through which they could express their political beliefs. Because individuals in non-democratic societies may lack a forum to express and manifest their political beliefs, the institution of elections in non-democratic societies would provide to individuals who may elect to express their political beliefs through force an alternative outlet to express their views in a peaceful manner.

In addition to the ideological effects that the democratization of the United Nations would have in harmonizing political systems and promoting the diffusion of democratic culture, the democratic process would also create channels of resource and information dissemination that could be utilized to improve lives and encourage respect for each individual’s rights and freedoms. The democratic election process is composed of five primary segments: voter registration; candidate nomination; campaigning; voting; and vote tabulation. Each of these segments can be leveraged to generate positive effects. First, the voter registration process is essentially a process of data collection, similar to a census, by which each potential voter provides demographic information in order to be identified as a qualified voter. Such demographic data could be useful in social scientific studies and calculating resource allocation and would improve upon the global data sets already in existence. Second, the candidate nomination
process, depending on how it would ultimately be configured, would provide individuals who may not have access to political power within their political system a means to assume a leadership position. This would deepen the pool of candidates eligible to assume political power and would improve the quality of political leadership by generating increased competition for such leadership positions. Third, the campaigning process would provide a means by which candidates from different societies can communicate their ideas, beliefs and values in societies where such ideas and beliefs may not otherwise be expressed. Candidates who engage in the campaigning process would serve as conduits through which different cultural values and beliefs are disseminated across the world. Fourth, the voting process, which generally requires the establishment of venues where ballots are cast, would create centers of resource and information distribution at which food, medicine, education and other forms of humanitarian aid could be provided to improve the lives of poor people, conquer hunger, disease and illiteracy and to encourage respect for each individual’s rights and freedoms. Using data gathered during the voter registration process to efficiently organize and allocate the distribution of humanitarian aid at voting precincts, the distribution of humanitarian aid could be used as an incentive to encourage voter participation and promote the diffusion of democratic culture. Fifth, the vote tabulation process would create moments of global cultural unity, similar to the Olympics, in which the spectacle of deciding global elections is likely to attract interest from people across the world. Global elections, and media coverage thereof, would provide novel media content to be communicated to a worldwide audience through mass communications technology, which would increase the visibility of the United Nations and enhance its relevance in the global cultural milieu.

In contrast to more onerous methods of establishing democratic institutions in non-democratic societies, such as the displacement of non-democratic political hegemonies through military action, the democratization of the United Nations would achieve superior results in a manner that is less costly,
more protective of human life and more respectful of the inherent sovereignty of nation states. The diffusion of democratic culture and the harmonization of political systems that would be encouraged through the democratization of the United Nations would not require radical reform, but rather, would only entail a relatively slight alteration in how the United Nations is organized. By tailoring the governmental structure of the United Nations to emulate the values and practices already established in democratic political systems, many of the benefits of democratic culture could be shared with people in non-democratic societies in a manner that is not directly adversarial to the existing political hegemonies in such societies.

IV. Conclusion

The democratization of the United Nations would increase the United Nations’ effectiveness by broadening the scope of inputs into the governmental decision-making process and by making its political actors accountable to a worldwide electorate. Democratization of the United Nations would also increase the United Nations’ autonomy by shifting the source of its political legitimacy so that the consent to govern is obtained directly from the people. Further, the democratization of the United Nations would also provide opportunities to improve global data collection, increase accessibility to political power, promote democratic cultural diffusion, facilitate the distribution of humanitarian aid, solidify global cultural identity and enhance the relevance of the United Nations as an actor on the world stage.

The democratization of the United Nations would strengthen the foundation for world peace because it would create a mechanism by which different political systems could be harmonized, without the use of force, to adopt democracy as the source of their political legitimacy. Since harmonization of how different political systems value political legitimacy is a pre-condition for sustaining world peace because the successful arbitration of disputes between sovereign parties
requires agreement upon what qualifies as the source of political legitimacy for such arbitration to be accepted as binding, the democratization of the United Nations would enable democratic institutions to be established in non-democratic societies without radically displacing existing political hegemonies. It would create a channel of cultural diffusion through which democratic cultures could be organically formed in such non-democratic societies without the use of force. Peaceful diffusion of democratic culture through exposure and acceptance, as opposed to cultural imposition by force, is more likely to be successful because the consent of the people to be governed by democratic institutions would be voluntarily obtained, which is necessary for political legitimacy to be sustainable because resistance to the establishment of democratic institutions creates the ongoing risk of regression to non-democratic political forms.

The United Nations has been a powerful force in providing critical services throughout the world that are essential to international peace, security, stability and prosperity. It provides a unique platform for international action and global engagement. However, the United Nations has been limited because the source of its political legitimacy does not arise from popular election, but rather, is derived from delegations of power from its member states. This lack of independence impedes its ability to act on issues that may have popular support, but which may be opposed by individual member nations. The democratization of the United Nations would provide the people of the world a globally accessible forum to freely express their will in a manner that is not filtered by national interests, which is essential to the development of governmental structures that would make regional conflicts obsolete. Further, since the United Nations already has significant reach in almost all of the nations of the world, holding democratic elections in non-democratic member nations would accelerate the diffusion of democratic culture into such non-democratic societies by exposing the people of such societies to democratic norms and political practices. Ultimately, achieving world peace will require the global harmonization
of political systems to recognize each individual’s right to self-determination. The democratization of
the United Nations would create a mechanism to harmonize the political systems of the world in a
manner that promotes the development of democratic culture in peaceful co-existence with existing
political hegemonies.