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# Unlocking the Riddle of UN Reform for the 21st Century and Beyond: The Keys to Legitimate Governance

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## Abstract

The United Nations (UN) is many things, to many people, but few engage with this institution and its future in a reflexive and comprehensive manner. This analysis will respond by adopting a more holistic approach to UN reform, in the belief that to make sense of the full complexities of world politics, a whole host of different viewpoints will be required. By analysing, categorising and outlining possible new directions for UN reform, this analysis hopes to reinvigorate interest in a subject matter whose popularity seems to be faltering. By mapping out the complex manifestations of power, authority and legitimacy, and how they interact with one another across space and time, we can begin to paint a bigger picture about what may be required of the UN; not just for today, but also for tomorrow.

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# 1. Introduction

When the United Nations (UN) was formed in 1945, then-US President Harry Truman described its establishment as only the “first step to a lasting peace” (1945). 73 years later and the UN has lost its way, as some question how a “body designed to handle international problems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, can successfully handle the global problems of the 21<sup>st</sup>” (Graham, 2015, p. 3). Climate change and the increasingly transnational nature of conflict continue to befuddle the international community, as relying on the UN to resolve the challenges of contemporary world politics is said to be a “dead end invitation to cynicism and nihilism” (Falk, 2014, p. 49). However, while it has become popular to lament the failings of this international institution, this same enthusiasm does not seem to be forthcoming when it comes to uncovering possible solutions. Instead, we often lose sight of the fact that the UN was not conceived with the tools that are needed for the modern day, and if this institution has failed, it is because humankind has failed it.

To respond, this discussion will adopt a holistic approach towards UN reform, in the belief that deciphering the complexities of world politics requires a whole range of different viewpoints. Previous analyses are too simplistic in their approach and positivist in their assumptions, as the debate around the future of this institution is in dire need of a more comprehensive and productive discussion. To preface this point, however, we should also recognise that there is no silver bullet for institutional reform, and innovations within the UN will likely beget new challenges that vary across time and space; as well as across issue area. Therefore, rather than outlining a final proposal for change, this analysis will emphasise the eternal nature of UN reform, as we seek to “portray a direction, not a blueprint” (Keohane, 2001, p. 3). As legitimacy is recognised by some as the master concept (Mulligan, 2006) of world politics, we shall endeavour to explore how this international institution can be continually re-legitimised.

First, it will be important to engage with the pre-existing literature on UN reform, so that we can coordinate and build upon previous academic analysis. Not enough efforts have been made to take stock of this disorganised debate, and our analysis will culminate in a typology that distinguishes between the different forms and analytical scopes of UN reform proposals. Assessing the current state of the debate, and reflecting on the role of theory and practice will then allow us to consider how the different approaches to UN reform can be mutually constitutive. Situating this discussion within the field of global governance will prove useful and relatively innovative, as rejecting academia’s obsession with defining and narrowing one’s position will allow this discussion to remain sufficiently broad and holistic. We can then start considering the realities that UN reform must respond to, and observing the differing

manifestations of power, authority and legitimacy will reveal varying degrees of liquidity and solidity. These relationships are highly dynamic across time and place, and by outlining a matrix of legitimate governance, this discussion will hopefully encourage a historical appreciation about how UN reform may reinvigorate a seemingly faltering institution.

This analysis will be primarily academic, but grounded in the belief that academia can help push meaningful and practical changes in the day-to-day running of the UN. Such an ambitious undertaking will be challenging, and, at times, the broad nature of this discussion will see precision and clarity sacrificed in exchange for an attempt to grapple with the bigger picture.

## **2. Taking Stock of UN Reform**

Unsurprisingly, there are a wealth of previous analyses exploring routes for innovation within the UN. However, while there may be “an abundance of literature on UN reform, and Security Council reform in particular” (Drifte, 2000, p. 6), a crowd of voices does not automatically translate into a constructive dialogue. Instead, the literature has often lacked coherence, and depending on who you ask, “reform can entail expanding the United Nations bureaucracy or cutting it back” (Dujarric, 2015, p. 3). Perceptions of what is required of UN reform are highly subjective, and across these discussions perhaps the “only common denominator is a call for change” (Brunnee and Toope, 2008, p. 121). Rather than honing in on one particular type of change, this analysis will coordinate multiple arguments to arrive at a more holistic understanding of what is possible, and what is required of UN reform. The need for this discussion is great, as while “proposals for reforms and transformations are multiplying, [...] there are few who recognise the challenges of these international organisations” (Rioux and Fontaine-Skronski, 2015, p. 9).

If this discussion is to remain holistic, however, the diversity of approaches towards UN reform will require that we “fashion methodological tools that enable a systematic and comparative evaluation” (Niemetz, 2013, p. 10). This will not reveal a panacea to the problems of the UN, but it should remedy the mistakes of previous research, which has too readily assumed “what would need to be studied; namely the nature of the drivers of reform” (Parrat, 2014, p. 8). Critically reflecting “on whether our analytical toolkit is up to the task” (Pegram and Acuto, 2015, p. 9) will prepare the groundwork for how we perceive the changing realities that the UN should adapt to; but also how the UN may shape the reality that surrounds it. The empirical and theoretical implications to this discussion are rarely simultaneously acknowledged, and just as the world around us is constantly changing, the “academic world never stands still” (Buzan and Hansen, 2009, p. 271). Situating UN reform between these

empirical and normative considerations will be key to maintaining our holism, and it will also allow us to take stock of the many complex issues associated with UN reform.

## **2.1. Typologising UN Reform**

The importance of UN reform is demonstrated by the fact that it “has been on the agenda almost since the establishment of that organisation” (Sorensen, 2011, p. 152). Yet, while UN reform is said to be a “more popular topic than sex” (Weiss, 2011, p. 48), the “global community has no common definition” of what it entails (Blanchfield, 2009, p. 16). Some may be happy with this lack of specificity, believing that, when it comes to UN reform, quite simply we will know it when we see it. However, this complacency has arguably fostered some of the disarray characterising the current debate on UN reform, as very few seriously engage with its etymology. As a result, it will prove useful to identify some of the different understandings of UN reform that exist, so that we may navigate this discussion through an already vast and accumulating body of work.

Many discussions on UN reform are preoccupied with transforming the body tasked with maintaining international peace and security, the UN Security Council (UNSC). This is unsurprising, especially considering that it is regarded as both “the most powerful international institution in the history of the nation-state system” (Cronin and Hurd, 2008, p. 3); as well as the source of many of the UN’s criticisms. However, as “it is not possible to reform the UNSC without amending the UN Charter” (Cilliers, 2015), UN reform is sometimes synonymous with rewriting this document. Proposals of this kind differ significantly, with some calling for an expansion of the UNSC’s permanent membership (Gowan and Gordon, 2014) and others arguing that the entire “UN Charter be rewritten” (Pauwelyn et al., 2014, p. 745). With these proposals in mind, analysts are often critical of the UN’s stubbornness towards change. There are only three occasions where the Charter has been amended, the last of which occurred in 1973, and these were relatively uncontroversial amendments to accommodate expanding membership. The dearth of instances highlights the UN’s reluctance to change. In fact, the Charter sews the seeds of the UN’s failure to adapt, as Chapter XVIII states that any amendment needs to receive the support of two-thirds of the members of the General Assembly (UNGA), and the unanimous approval of the UNSC’s five permanent members (P5). In other words, attempts to reform the UN Charter rely on the consent of those same actors, whose own preeminent positions are often being challenged by proposals for change. It is not surprising then, that conservatism is baked into the DNA of this institution, as legal reform becomes naturally illusive.

This poses a conundrum for UN reform, and it has led some to criticise these discussions as being “circular and a bit pointless” (Gowan, 2016). States are both self-interested and concerned with the relative gains of their partners, and for reform to succeed, it is argued a “win-win situation must be created, in which no UN member state sees itself as a loser of the reform process” (Schaefer, 2017, p. 85). Though it is not beyond the realms of possibility, a scenario where all parties feel like equal winners is difficult to envisage. Therefore, no matter how eloquently expressed or logically justified, the majority of proposals for reform have fallen on deaf ears, and will likely continue to do so. To avoid letting cynicism further infect this debate, however, we should note that this defeatism stems from a narrow preoccupation with reforming the UN Charter. Understanding the barriers to amending this legal document are undoubtedly important, but there are other more neglected areas of focus which are deserving of our attention. Weiss goes as far to claim that “jostling about UN Charter reform is a mere distraction” (2003, p. 153).

Crucially, those who lament the UN’s failure to enact reform, fail to explain why this institution looks so different from the one that was founded in 1945. Since this time, we have witnessed the proliferation of UN members, agencies, treaties and norms, meaning that today the UN can no longer “be thought of as a unitary actor, due to its conglomerate and decentralised nature” (Ostensen, 2011, p. 757). Thus, while legal amendments to the UN Charter may be scarce, a second approach views UN reform as “not an event [but] a process that has been underway since before the organisation was even founded” (Kraus, 2011, p. 1). The International Labour Organisation (ILO) was established in 1919, but it became the first specialised agency of the UN in 1946. Multiple other UN organs have subsequently emerged, evolving over time in terms of “membership, structure and management” (Ghebali, 1985, p. 317). Regardless of legal consent, this process of piecemeal change has resulted in a UN hodgepodge of “modern day Frankensteins” (Barnett and Sikkink, 2011, p. 757), who differ in their size and remit. Whether these actors play the role of principal or agent, creator or monster, their growth and proliferation within the UN demonstrate a clear process of change over time.

We can subsequently identify two key forms of UN reform, one a *moment* of change in the UN’s founding document; and the other a *process* of informal adaptation. These have received varying rates of attention as they have occurred to differing degrees, but the prevalence of one should not preclude a simultaneous consideration of the other. To aid this, we should reflect upon a third consideration which extends our scope of analysis beyond the UN, as “reform is understood to refer to the basic adjustments needed to ensure continuing relevance to the global problematique” (Falk, 2005, p. 154). This problematises the previous two understandings, as it places greater emphasis on the ends rather than the means of

reform. Change is not always beneficial, and while this may raise further questions about the subjectivity and efficacy of any innovation, the status quo can be more desirable. With this consideration in mind, there is an ongoing debate about whether fragmentation within the UN is a “creation of powerful countries used to pursue parochial interests, [or ] a rational response to the increasing complexity of society” (Zurn and Faude, 2013, p. 120). The lack of consensus “regarding the relative advantages and disadvantages of fragmentation” (Biermann et al., 2009, p. 32) would suggest that this process of change can be viewed as both an impediment to, and a product of, UN reform.

Regardless of the causes of transformation within the UN, the danger associated with unconventional challenges like climate change, has led some to the conclusion that piecemeal change is no longer sufficient (Biermann et al., 2012, p. 1306). Incremental change may be a functional response to new challenges, but this “incrementalism is sub-optimal because it is based on short run, localised ad hoc responses” (Jessop, 1998, p. 29). Thus, due to “path dependencies and the disproportionate influence of vested interests” (Lake, 2010, p. 690), UN reform has proven either too illusive or inadequate in preparing this institution for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. For this reason, some suggest that we “forget about trying to get the planet’s nearly 200 countries to agree” (Naim, 2009), and begin looking for solutions to the world’s problems beyond the UN.

There is undeniable appeal to the prospect of beginning anew, free from the intrinsic defects of the UN Charter or the common criticisms of Western bias. Retrofitting an old instrument with new capabilities is costly and often sub-optimal, reasonably regarded as the second best option to acquiring a state of the art model. However, while a clean break is appealing, when considering options for the future we should always be careful to keep an eye on the past. The UN has made the world a better place, and rather than risking its gains, we should be seeking to build upon them instead. In other words, “the proper response to the defects of a legitimate institution is to try to reform it rather than to overthrow it” (Buchanan and Keohane, 2011, p. 43). This highlights a fourth key point to consider in relation to UN reform, as the lure of new, institutional arrangements demonstrates the danger of conducting this discussion within a vacuum. Fragmentation has occurred inside the UN, but it has also occurred beyond it. New and emerging institutions should inform and guide our proposals for reform, rather than negate them. The International Criminal Court (ICC), for example, was established in 2002, and while it works in close collaboration with the UN, this novel, judiciary body remains distinctly independent. In fact, the UNGA’s role in negotiating the Rome Statute points to a reform in function rather than composition, as the outsourcing of certain tasks suggests a more directorial role for the UN today.

To sum up this discussion, Figure 1 outlines a typology of the distinct understandings and considerations of UN reform that have been identified, as they differ in their form and analytical scope.

**Figure 1. Typology of UN Reform**

		Analytical Scope	
		Inside	Outside
Forms of Reform	Moment	<p><b>Legal Reform</b> (Amendment to UN Charter)</p>	<p><b>Reform in Function</b> (Relationship with the ICC and regional Blocs)</p>
	Process	<p><b>Organic Reform</b> (Growth of specialised agencies, i.e. ILO, WHO)</p>	<p><b>Effectiveness of Reform</b> (Changing nature of global challenges)</p>

It may seem counterintuitive to look outside the UN for our referent object of UN reform, but doing so allows a better observation of the role that this institution should play; and how effectively it does so in the face of evolving challenges. Though discussions of UN reform are often pessimistic, the eclecticism of this typology outlines an account of the bigger picture, which may offer some relief from this recurring sense of defeatism. It is worth pointing out that a similar typology looks at the who, what, how, when and why of UN reform (Kostakos, 2018), but while this emerges from an engagement with the empirical instances of institutional transformation, ours derives from an engagement with academia. Of course, neither of these typologies can claim to be exhaustive, and there is no reason why they cannot co-exist, as both should assist academics and policymakers in framing a holistic understanding of UN reform.

In a more philosophical sense, however, our typology should help begin to explain change across both temporal and spatial domains, as the different elements of UN reform interact in mutually enforcing ways. There is a tendency to view UN reform as a moment of change rather than as a process over time, and while this is understandable in the same way that revolution is more perceptible to the naked eye than evolution, it biases our analysis to observe continuity in the moment rather than change over time. Thus, while some regard the UN in spatial terms as a static institution, others believe that its existence can only be understood through the process of a mutually constituting relationship (Whitehead, 1929).

Change is therefore constant, if only because of the unrelenting nature of time and the fact that relationships are being reinterpreted from one moment to the next. This point may seem impractical for what at heart is a very practical debate, but to navigate the journey ahead, proposals for UN reform must understand how to harness change and continuity; as their interactions differ across time and space. History is often told through the recounting of dramatic events on specific dates, but the non-occurrence of these events does not mean that there is not a story unfolding below the surface. Instead, a moment can never be entirely separated from the historical process that came before, and small changes do accumulate over time to trigger tipping points of far-reaching change. Therefore, while a legal overhaul of the UN Charter seems unlikely and incremental change proves insufficient, these approaches to UN reform are not necessarily mutually exclusive (Hale and Held, 2017). Instead, further analysis should acknowledge and begin to learn how small steps, if taken in the right direction, can lead to great leaps forward.

Essentially then, proposals for UN reform should “strike a balance between realism and idealism” (Thakur, 2004, p. 68) as visions of fundamental change should be combined with an appreciation of the pragmatism of incrementalism. A legal overhaul of the UN may be improbable for the time being, but by resorting to other processes of change we can consider how to direct this institution so that much needed reform can be achieved later on. However, we should also be careful not to conflate these approaches towards UN reform, as both have their own analytical utility, and there is a danger “for pragmatism to overwhelm vision” (Mani, 2015, p. 1243). To avoid watered down proposals, the demarcations made within this typology must be respected, and when taking stock of UN reform, each element should be understood and valued in its own right. These analytical distinctions should not encourage a silo-isation of the debate either, and further analysis must consider the practical question about how one type of change can foster the other.

## **2.2. The State of the Debate**

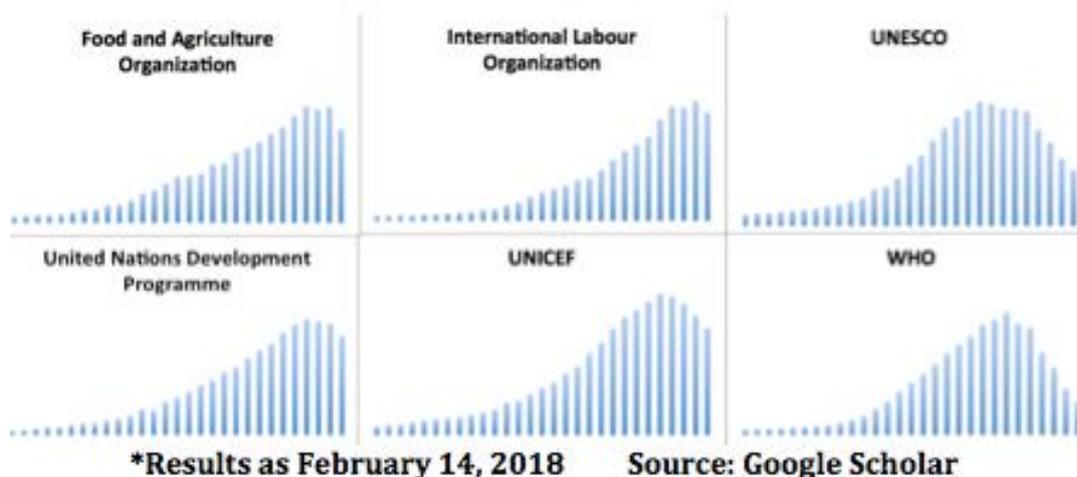
Pessimism often dominates the narrative around UN reform and the UN more generally, but recent events have given some slight cause for optimism. For instance, UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres, whose appointment has been interpreted as a reflection of the P5’s desire for a more decisive executive (Oliveira, 2015), indicated that reform of the UN architecture would be a priority of his tenure. Although it is still too early to judge him on this promise, and while all Secretary Generals experience something of a honeymoon, the early signs are promising. In fact, a recent report published by the UNSG outlined seven major changes to “address the fragmentation and bureaucratisation of the UN system” (Lebada,



publications that mention this institution has more than halved. Thus, while international cooperation through the UN has become “increasingly difficult and deficient at precisely the time when it is needed most” (Hale et al., 2013), it would appear that the same holds true for critical analysis of the UN.

One may infer that a decline in activity and effectiveness of the UN has resulted in a decline in academic engagement, but this does not do justice to the complexities of UN reform. We should therefore consider the often-neglected question of “what the actual connection between external context and internal conceptual change could be” (Schmidt, 1998, p. 35). Theory may follow practice but this is not invariably the case, and levels of academic engagement often reflect more than empirical trends or external events. The UN is made up of a variety of different sub-entities, and while they vary significantly in terms of their performance and the challenges they face, Figure 3 outlines a similar decline in academic interest for all of them.

**Figure 3. Academic Publications Referring to other UN Agencies and Programmes**



Again, these indicators are not flawless, but they all seem to point to a growing disenfranchisement with the UN that goes deeper than concerns about performance. We should subsequently seek to understand the tricky “relationship between our academic tools [...] and the object of our study of research” (Vilanova, 2013, p. 31), especially considering that fragmentation has occurred both within the UN and the political sciences. Of course, this may raise more questions than answers for UN reform, but those who fail to appreciate how “theory and practice are inextricably interwoven, [are] more likely [to] fall hostage to the politics and parochial prejudices of both time and place” (Hurrell, 2011, p. 145).

Theory is a practical tool that allows us to understand that '2+2=4', but in a grander and more emancipatory sense, it also allows us to question the very existence of numbers, and how they came to evolve over time. Once again, this point may seem too conceptual to be practical, but this relationship between theory and practice determines whether we accept the realities of world politics today, or whether we are "able to muster the stimulus for a new creative forward movement" (Cox, 2014, p. 162). The pessimism and declining engagement with the UN would unfortunately suggest that this creativity is illusive, but at its heart, the UN is a visionary project that is in dire need of a boost in the arm. The creative potential of theory is demonstrated by the very existence of the UN, as in 1945 the victors of World War II had the ingenuity to put their ideas into practice and redefine world politics for a generation. Academics sadly came to "despair quantum jumps to world order as utopian and unmindful of political realities" (Bloomfield, 1962, p. 633), and theory has often been employed as a rudimentary problem solving tool instead. For a puzzle like UN reform this will not suffice, however, and a two-tiered approach is therefore preferable, where one "track would continue to be available as a support for negotiating and maintaining peace" and the "second track would see some components of the UN system acting as *interlocuteurs valables* for emerging social forces and as providing some of the intellectual groundwork for their strategic thinking" (Cox, 1997, p. 113). An appreciation of how theory can inform practice and vice versa, will prove useful in understanding the obstacles that UN reform will need to overcome in the years ahead.

At 73 years of age, it is unsurprising that there is complacency around the UN's survival, as very few people alive today can remember a time before it existed. However, if the UN was created not "to bring us to heaven, but in order to save us from hell" (Hammarskjöld, 1954, p. 7), as the threats to humankind continue to change, the UN must continually adapt to remain relevant. Stagnating academic engagement at a time when adaptation is increasingly important is worrying, and resignation should be replaced by a rekindling of the spirit and vision of 1945. This may be easier said than done, but in the end, the only obstacle standing in humankind's way is ourselves; and this is by no means insurmountable. In preparation for 2020 and beyond, therefore, discussions on UN reform should acknowledge that a "responsible scholar is an interpreter with an eye towards progressive change, and in spirit as well as substance, opposed to the scientific pretensions of positivist epistemologies" (Falk, 2016, p. 503). Our next task shall subsequently be to identify an analytical lens that can reinvigorate a faltering discussion, while simultaneously appreciating the holistic nature of UN reform.

### 2.3. A 'Holistic' Lens for UN Reform

UN reform requires an analytical lens that can appreciate both the practical realities of today and the transformative potential of tomorrow. The positivism of international relations has “made it impossible to explain, assess, or capture the social aspects of life” (Barnett and Sikkink, 2011, p. 759), but the very existence of the UN is testament to the fact that “anarchy is what states make of it” (Wendt, 1992, p. 395). To subsequently understand world politics and our capacity to reshape it, Weiss argues that our “immediate task is to fuse idealism and realism in a global vision ‘vinaigrette’” (2014, p. 24). Though the sentiment is generally correct, the strategy risks diluting the analytical potency of each position, and over time, we can observe how international relations has been plagued by a “narrow ‘neo-neo’ synthesis” (Buzan, 2001, p. 472). It will subsequently be useful to draw from, and contribute to, the study of global governance, which is described as consisting of “the systems of rule at all levels of human activity – from the family to the international organisation” (Rosenau, 1995, p. 13).

Global governance provides a greater appreciation of the importance of authority and the role of non-state actors, as it has distanced itself from an overt focus on state power and the comparable gains of cooperation. In just a short space of time, “the global governance literature has made an important contribution to our understanding of global affairs” (Paris, 2015, p. 412), and its utilisation in relation to UN reform should prove equally fruitful. However, despite the growing consensus about the “need for global governance reform for the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Bradford, n.d., p. 8), practical discussions about reform are rather conspicuous by their absence. Instead, global governance has directed its “analysis away from design, toward a drilling down of incentive structures” (Coen and Pegram, 2015, p. 419), as it is more descriptive than prescriptive in its approach. Nevertheless, if “the United Nations is the symbol and core of global governance” (Thakur, 2003, p. 5), then realigning it with a focus on UN reform should yield insight into the issues that lie at the heart of this debate. Though international relations will remain relevant, global governance has entailed a “shift from a ‘cooperation paradigm’ to a ‘governance paradigm’” (Koenig-Archibugi, 2006, p. 2), and this should help account for the additional intricacies of the UN reform puzzle.

For all its analytical advances, meanwhile, the “careless use of the term global governance has contributed to rendering the academic discourse as confusing as it is” (Dingwerth and Pattberg, 2006, p. 187). By distancing itself from the positivism of international relations, and “thereby avoiding epistemological and ontological arrogance” (Dixon and Dogan, 2003, p. 221), global governance has become a hotbed of conceptual ambiguity. Failure to engage with the etymology of global governance has led to a disorganised field, as it refers simultaneously to an analytical lens, a global phenomenon and a Western, liberal

political project (Ba and Hoffman, 2005). However, while these different conceptualisations of global governance will foster confusion, its innate holism is what makes it so appealing for our discussion. Its utility derives from an ability to comprehend the importance of theory and practice, and observe how the reality of world politics and our perceptions of it are symbiotically linked. For instance, global governance has focused on the growing role of non-state actors in recent times, while acknowledging that this is not an entirely new phenomenon: these actors have always been relevant; we are just more aware of them now. Global governance should therefore be treated as a “floating signifier instead of arbitrarily reducing it to any particular meaning” (Hofferberth, 2015, p. 607), as conceptual ambiguity is arguably its greatest attribute for discussions about UN reform. Earlier, we outlined a typology of UN reform to help navigate a messy debate, but to fully utilise this tool and appreciate the holistic nature of UN reform we must possess an analytical lens that is capable of observing and explaining this holism. Neither UN reform nor global governance are clearly defined disciplines, and we should be careful to engage with their “immanent confusion in a reflective and cautious way” (Hofferberth, 2016, p. 1). Nuanced explanations are often overlooked in favour of single cause variables, but to fully explain phenomena in world politics we must begin “to pluralize, to relative and to historicize” (Hurrell, 2016, p. 11).

To coordinate this inherent confusion, it will be useful to draw upon the English School, which provides a more “historicist, constructivist and methodological pluralistic approach” (Buzan, 2001, p. 472). Though global governance and the English School “share similar views of the world, there has not been a great deal of dialogue between these two academic perspectives” (Dunne, 2005, p. 72). A cross-fertilisation of these positions will prove mutually beneficial, as while the English School is criticised for its state centrism, its commitment to methodological pluralism should help navigate the “crazy-quilt nature of global governance” (Rosenau, 2003, p. 27). Of course, this approach is not without its detractors, and some have argued that a commitment to methodological pluralism is “ultimately a political claim more than a methodological claim” (Barkin, 2008, p. 219). However, rather than cherry picking an individual position to justify a proposal for UN reform, methodological pluralism allows us to fully utilise academia’s “concurrent efforts to explain issues of global governance” (Ku and Weiss, 1998, p. 9). In a world of ‘alternate facts’, perceptions of reality are highly contested, and although a tall order, any approach towards UN reform should seek to ensure that “political reality is explained in all its institutional complexity” (Schmidt, 2014). There are “overlapping streams of thought – sometimes competing, sometimes complementary” (Bellamy, 2005, p. 12), and these should work with, rather than against, each other when considering routes forward for UN reform.

One could certainly delve further into the ontological and epistemological assumptions that drive this approach, but this would fuel an unhealthy obsession that academia has with methodology. Rather than pigeonholing oneself in a positivist or interpretivist research tradition, we should endeavour to “be fluent among multiple methodologies and criteria – that is, to be pragmatic, pluralistic and a bricoleur” (Korte, 2016, p. 125). Segmenting fields of study that seek to explain the same phenomena risks further fragmenting and incapacitating the political sciences, as they have seemingly failed the UN. No architect would expect a building to be constructed by a single craftsman, and nor should any academic endeavour to explain the complexities of world politics without considering a range of different positions. This analysis will hope to outline a more practical and flexible approach to UN reform, one that is less bound by the rigidity of artificially segmented fields of thought.

### **3. Governing the Realities of UN Reform**

Theory has great potential to drive UN reform forward, and so far, we have sought to summarise, categorise and outline the future of this debate. However, Weiss and Wilkinson argue that though theorising UN reform is “useful and even essential, [...] it does not tell us anything about the broader system of global governance” (2015, p. 400). Of course, this is not necessarily accurate, and rather than wholeheartedly embracing this dichotomy between practice and theory, we should explore how normative thought and empirical reality interact. UN reform transcends this intellectual divide between ‘what we know’ and ‘what is’, and some of the practical questions that guide UN reform should be accounted for. For instance, Cox argues that “institutionalisation is a means of stabilising and perpetuating a particular order” (1981, p. 136), but for who and for what purpose is reform being proposed? Meanwhile, Thakur claims that if the UN “is in crisis, it is a crisis of expectations” (2004, p. 67), but these will vary across actors, regions and issues. In trying to navigate these concerns, we should accept that proposals for reform will be controversial and the ‘right’ change within the UN will always be contestable. The UN was established to maintain international peace and security, and while there are times when it is called upon to respond to clear existential threats, there are other times when “modern society is facing itself” (Rasmussen, 2001, p. 290). To understand this dilemma we should acknowledge the “real-world merging of risk and security” (Hameiri and Jones, 2015, p. 24), and proposals for UN reform must understand the complex array of challenges that face us today.

Legitimacy will provide a useful focal point for UN reform as for international institutions it is an “organisational imperative” (Selznick, 1996, p. 273). Sadly, however, “the standards of legitimacy of international organisations are yet to be developed” (d’Aspermont, 2007, p. 7),

and more analytical work is required to understand how reform can legitimise the UN. Legitimacy is “multi-dimensional in character” (Beetham, 2013, p. 15), but our commitment to holism should put us in good stead to garner new insights into this fertile intellectual terrain. Intrinsically connected to power and authority, legitimacy forms part of a broader “conceptual labyrinth” (Uphoff, 1998, p. 296), as Lake claims it is “the bridge between compulsion and choice” (2009, p. 333). All three are distinct concepts, but “any attempt to separate them is bound to be somewhat artificial” (Raz, 2006, p. 128), and deciphering this trinity will prove invaluable for understanding UN reform. Our attention will therefore be directed towards the “structure of global authority”, the “myriad ways that power is exercised”, the changing nature of history, and the “causes, consequences and drivers of change” (Weiss and Wilkinson, 2014, p. 207). Such a vast scope may seem intimidating, but these concerns are interconnected and their relationships paint a bigger picture around UN reform. Barnett and Duvall have identified “four concepts of power: compulsory, institutional, structural and productive” (2005, p. 39), while others correspond these with the “four main bases of authority in global politics” (Piiparinen, 2013, p. 50). These interact and shape the “four modes of governance – hierarchy, delegation, collaboration and orchestration” (Abbott et al., 2012, p. 6), and legitimacy can qualify these forms of governance in relation to our typology of UN reform. Tying all of these concepts together will allow us to better consider the road ahead, and a matrix of legitimate governance will be outlined as a heuristic tool to aid future debates on UN reform.

### **3.1. Legitimacy of Power and Authority**

Power, authority and legitimacy are traditionally seen to reside within the sovereign state, which, according to Weber, possesses a “monopoly of legitimate physical force” (1919). This is the “formal-legal conception of authority that precludes, by definition, the possibility of hierarchy between political units” (Lake, 2005, p. 2), as authority exists above and not between individuals. As a result, the anarchic international system is devoid of authority in the Weberian sense, a fact that could only be remedied by transforming the UN into a hierarchically structured global state. Scheuerman bolsters this argument by suggesting that for the UN to fulfil its purpose, it must adopt “some of the more familiar attributes of modern statehood” (2008, p. 141). Though much more could be made about this topic, the ideational potential of a world state is severely underutilised. Pockets of engagement do exist, but since 1945, the notion of a world state has usually been dismissed as “a fond dream or a terrible nightmare” (Geyer, 1974, p. 38). However, this is not the end of our discussion, and saying that global politics is defined by anarchy is “not the same thing as saying there is no legitimacy and no authority that matter” (Weber and Jentleson, 2010, p. 123). We can observe various UN sub-entities above the nation-state, and the UNSC clearly governs “through hierarchy, directly

imposing hard law on states in the form of resolutions, peacekeeping missions, military intervention and sanctions” (Haufler, 2015, p. 319). Regardless of whether states choose to obey, international law is legally binding, and if there is a “moral duty to obey the law” (Holzgreffe, 2009, p. 36), then power does not exist exclusively in world politics at the expense of authority and legitimacy.

Questioning instead “what exactly legitimates the rules under Weber’s legal type of authority” (Beetham, 1991, p. 39), reveals that the legitimacy of the law resembles the emperor’s new clothes; it exists because people believe it exists. The threat of punishment may explain compliance, but if there is a moral duty to obey an immoral rule, then the concept of a “legitimate political authority is incoherent” (Ladenson, 1972, p. 336). However, we should avoid the pitfalls of equating anarchy with freedom, and legality with legitimacy. As Dahl notes, “procedures are means to ends, not ends in themselves” (1999, p. 25), and individuals consent to the legal authority of the state, not because it is the law, but because government “is a public good; as well as potential supplier of public goods” (Anomaly, 2015, p. 111). In a similar vein, states positioned the UN in 1945 as “the primary provider of security as a global public good” (Hale, Held and Young, 2013, p. 69); as individually maintaining security in conditions of anarchy would be challenging. Consent, not legal status, therefore is what provides the UN with its authority; as it derives its “unique legitimacy and its unmatched convening power from its universal membership” (Thakur, 2003, p. 4).

One could understandably proclaim the end of anarchy, but despite states universally consenting to the UN’s legal mandate, the Charter “does not give it direct control of the tools with which to enact those powers” (Hurd, 2002, p. 35). Even when the UNSC is capable of reaching an agreement, as it did recently with UNSC Resolution 2401 which called for a ceasefire in Syria, it lacks the means of enforcing such decisions. If an institution’s “efficacy of power is the only source of its legitimacy” (Cerruti, 2011, p. 125), then consent on its own is not enough. In other words, the UN’s legitimacy suffers, as it has been delegated authority but not the power needed to enforce it. A standing army for the UN may seem intuitively appealing as a result, but “as long as a structure exists that can command and enforce a collective response to threats” (Wendt, 2003, p. 506), then the UN can legitimise itself through other means. As our typology of UN reform revealed, a change in function or a redefinition of relationships can allow other, better equipped, actors to carry out certain tasks. We may want the UN to solve all our problems but we must recognise that today it is “more likely to exhibit institutional than compulsory power” (Barnett and Duvall, 2014, p. 56); meaning that other actors’ involvement in this process is essential for now. As the “state possesses the legitimate coercive capacity necessary to deal with issues such as collective security” (Williams, 2005,

p. 147), we must explore how this power can be ameliorated with the UN's institutional authority.

This is where the conflict lies in the UN. The Charter legally enshrines the sovereign equality of all member states, but the UN is frequently criticised for its “radically unequal distribution of decision-making authority” (Buchanan and Keohane, 2004, p. 9). All states are equal, but clearly some states are more equal than others. This tension was written into the Charter in 1945, and is still relevant today as proposals for UN reform consistently “clash between great power management and sovereign equality” (Parrat, 2014, p. 17). This trade-off between procedural fairness and substantive outcome, however, is arguably justified within the UN, as the “Council structure has helped to maintain peace between its permanent members” (Bosco, 2014, p. 548). Therefore, we should be careful not to undo the UN's achievements through radical overhauls to its composition, but similarly the “legitimacy of the Security Council depends on the sense that its future will be better than its past” (Keohane, 2011, p. 106). The UNSC still reflects the power distributions of 1945, and Acharya justifiably calls for greater “decision-making authority of the emerging powers” (2014, p.199). Economy, population and regional prominence are all used to justify a candidate's ascension to the UNSC, but if this body is attributed with upholding security, then arguably the greatest concern of all is nuclear weapons. This is a good example of the fine line that UN reform must tread, as although the “P-5 are all nuclear powers, the fact that India is a nuclear power is a double-edged sword” (Mathur, 2005, p. 5). Awarding authority on the basis of nuclear power may prevent the likelihood of nuclear Armageddon by encouraging dialogue, but this could equally incentivise nuclear proliferation.

Few would accept North Korea's inclusion within the UNSC, and in procedural terms, rogue states' presence within the UN is unjustifiable. Authority is conferred from the citizen to the state, and from the state to the UN, but this is not a static contract and the chain of conferral can be broken. Authoritarian states' ratification of the UN Charter may confer legal authority, but this does not necessarily confer legitimacy, “for the simple reason that there is no legitimacy to transfer” (Buchanan and Keohane, 2006, p. 7). Instead, the “idea that traditional international law is necessarily legitimate and democratically accountable, because it is based on state consent, can no longer be accepted blindly” (Pauwelyn et al., 2014, p. 748). According to Christiano, legitimacy can only be achieved by international institutions if they are “a fair system of voluntary association among highly representative states” (2010, p. 127); as the chain of consent remains unbroken. Ways of democratising the UN shall be important moving forward as technological innovation makes global democracy increasingly possible. However, consent on its own will not suffice, and proposals for reform should be careful to “avoid falling victim to the myth of democratic omnipotence” (Zurn, 2000, p. 189). Democracy is a means to

an end rather than an end in itself, and procedural change must also be shown to have substantive benefit. The founders of the UN were aware of this, and in contrast to the “League of Nations, the Charter does not contain provisions for withdrawal” (Kelsen, 1948, p. 29). This may undermine the principle of conferred and conditional authority, but such an omission from the Charter, albeit symbolic, detracts from the leverage that states may have when threatening to take their toys, and go home. By learning the lessons from the demise of the League, this rule is possibly justified by its substantive benefit.

Legitimacy is finely balanced between substantive outcome and procedural means, and proposals for reform should navigate the management of power and the conferral of authority. Global democracy and a world army may prove useful targets for the long run, but these ideas are handpicked from the state blueprint and applied directly to the international domain. This arguably conceals the fact that these concepts are products of their time and place, and do not necessarily reflect the other diverse trends of power and authority in world politics today. Understanding how the UN's legal framework can guide and regulate the exercise of state power will remain important for future discussions, but increasingly in world politics, “the state is far from the only game in town” (Abbott and Snidal, 2009, p. 87).

### **3.2. Legitimisation of Power and Authority**

Established to prevent war between states, the UN can largely be deemed a success as, since 1945, only 15% of armed conflicts have occurred between sovereign nations (The Economist, 2013). This does, however, beg the question about what lies on the other side of this statistic. While interstate war is less prevalent today, the world does not necessarily feel safer. Instead ‘new’ threats have risen to the fore, as transnational terrorism, climate change, health pandemics and human rights concerns all accompany the more traditional militaristic discussions of security. This clash between the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ is reflected in debates on UN reform, as proposals differ in their prioritisation of “human security or collective security” (Jaeger, 2010, p. 60). In fact, some argue that this is a major hindrance to reforming this institution, as it “is called upon to solve two rather distinct political problems” (Voetens, 2008, p. 301). However, while it has become popular to regard the individual as the referent object to be secured, the “introduction of the notion of human security has failed to lead to the formation of a unified organisational structure” (Krahmann, 2003, p. 15). Instead “post-hierarchical forms of governance” (de Burca et al., 2014, p. 478) have emerged, as the altered nature of security has witnessed a similar, more diffuse, transformation in its provision. Not enough has been made about these emerging phenomena and their relationship to

transforming security provision, as “mirroring security studies neglect of global governance, [global governance has] generally neglected security issues” (Hameiri and Jones, 2015, p. 4).

If legitimacy derives partially from substantive benefit, and if security is a good to be delivered, then in an “economic analysis, it matters what type of ‘security’ is analysed” (Engerer, 2010, p. 140). Traditionally, international security has been regarded as a global public good, being non-rivalrous and non-excludable in nature. This inevitably requires a greater role for the state, as left to the invisible hand of the market, under-provision of security is always likely. However, the expansive nature of security today has meant its provision “will involve an ever changing mixture of ‘public’ (i.e. the state) and ‘private’ (non-governmental), depending on time and place” (Grayson, 2001, p. 2); as many of the economic characteristics of security have seemingly changed. Threats no longer seem to respect borders in the same way they once did, and often the actors most capable of resolving certain issues are neither states nor international institutions. The increasingly transnational nature of security has subsequently seen the conferral of authority go in many directions, both across and between local, national, regional and global levels. The growing array of actors and issues has clearly contributed to an increased complexity regarding security provision, as the efficiency of power and the conferral of authority are both disrupted. Some do acknowledge and respond to this complexity, but they often do so without much coordination between the different sectors, actors or regions (Zurn, 2012); and their actions are often inefficient or unconsented to as a result. This has implications for our discussion, and we can confidently echo the claim made by Scholte, that “legitimacy is generally weak in contemporary global governance” (2011, p. 111).

To navigate a way through this drought, we can consider the “emerging (and as yet inchoate) institution of multistakeholderism” (Raymond and DeNardis, 2016, p. 1); which Cammaerts argues provides a solution to the “deep crisis in the legitimacy of international (and national) political institutions” (2011, p. 3). Whereas multilateralism is the domain of nation-states, multistakeholderism is more collaborative between states, civil society and private actors; as they are awarded equal weightings of importance. This may seem a strange approach towards security, a domain that has traditionally been the sole remit of the sovereign state, but there are plenty of arguments for it. Kaldor argues that in relation to ‘new wars’, “civil society is better equipped than government to undertake action at the level of society” (2001, p. 133). Furthermore, Doria claims that civil society may provide a greater means for individuals to participate on the world stage, and supplement the democratic deficiencies in world politics (2013). Meanwhile, private actors often possess the capacity and substantive means lacked by the international community to deliver security on a variety of issues, and the UN and its member states are already dependent on private security firms. This is not to

declare the irrelevance of multilateralism, but through its sheer diversity of actors, multistakeholderism provides a bricolage of approaches towards governance. Each actor brings something unique to the table, and through their collaboration they can bolster legitimacy “not only in terms of outcome, but also in terms of process” (Ayres and Braithwaite, 1991). It may seem intuitive to institutionalise multistakeholderism within the UN Charter, but we should not pretend that it is flawless or politically neutral. Instead, when multistakeholderism has been employed on the ground, to bolster the legitimacy of security governance, the results have generally been mixed (Hoffman et al., 2016). Therefore, we should acknowledge that “public-private partnerships are no silver bullet” (Cavelty and Suter, 2009) to the woes of the UN, as Carr questions whether these constitute partnerships at all (2016).

To understand the contention around multistakeholderism, we should recognise that “global governance cannot be reduced to the provision of international public goods” (Hurrell, 2015, p. 1). The state is often justified as an authority on the basis that it provides security from an otherwise anarchic existence, but this authority “is based on the stabilisation of a relationship between actors, which is subject to change” (Sending, 2017, p. 325). Material capabilities are one part of a complex process, and while it may seem rational to confer authority upon a unified state; history, culture and ideology alter perceptions of legitimacy. Rather than thinking of authority in institutionalised or solid terms, therefore, Krisch argues that it is better to think of it as being liquid and dispersed, as the “actual degree of dynamism depends on the stability and extent of social recognition practices” (2017, p. 244). This has implications for multistakeholderism, as over time, we have witnessed an ideological change in where authority is seen to legitimately reside. Where once states were the providers of security, today they are regarded as a “threat for human security; paradoxically they also become a threat for themselves” (Cavelty, 2014, p. 710). Hierarchical conceptualisations of ‘governor’ and ‘governed’ are now accompanied by more collaborative, so-called ‘partnerships’, as the shifting discursive production of meaning through symbolic titles points to a new ordering principle in world politics. In other words, the emergence of new threats and means for dealing with them can be described as a “global governmentalisation of security and the securitisation of global governance” (De Larringa and Doucet, 2010, p. 2).

This changing rationale of governance echoes our typology of UN reform, as it reflects an alteration in the UN’s function and effectiveness, as expectations vary according to actors and threats. The process of “UN reform constitutes the UN as a project of managing and regulating the global population” (Jaeger, 2010, p. 52), and constructions of knowledge influence our perceptions of reality over time; which subsequently alter our behaviour. Discussions on UN reform should be aware of the power of self-reflexivity, and understand

how seemingly insignificant social relationships can actually effect far greater change. What is legitimate to one may not be legitimate to another, and those who can determine these criteria of acceptability, arguably control the direction and nature of world politics. Zurn argues that the “recognition of external authority is based on the knowledge about one’s own rationality, and thus the epistemic constructions that identify these limits” (2017, p. 264). In other words, perceptions of legitimacy are shaped through bottom-up discursive processes of learning, which are then consolidated through their interaction with top-down structural forces. The importance of this point cannot be overstated, as it allows us to observe how systematic change can be achieved over time. Though universal suffrage has yet to be achieved, we should not “ignore the way democracy itself has only comparatively recently become legitimate within states” (Brasset and Tsingou, 2011, p. 13). This did not occur overnight, and where democracy does receive respect, it was often as a result of a hard fought process of education about the importance of ‘people power’. UN reform should therefore advance strategies and principles of governance to help frame and respond to certain deficiencies in world politics, but acknowledge that this is also tied up in relations of power. For instance, Harden argues that “democratisation of global governance could be employed as a tactic to further [powerful actors’] power relating to legitimacy” (2014, p. 13).

Spheres of inter-subjectivity do exist, and this is one of the challenges that complicates proposals for UN reform. Emerging rationalities have challenged the supremacy of the state, but this does not necessarily mean that there has been widespread acceptance of institutional forms like multistakeholderism. There are many reasons for this, but where empire has historically been the ordering principle over anarchy, scholars are more accepting of sovereignty and dubious of transnational processes (Barnett and Sikkink, 2011). World politics is clearly heterogeneous, and though the “ultimate goal of multilateralism [was] the dissolution of power into law” (Smouts, 1999, p. 294), enforcing homogeneity amidst such cultural diversity inevitably provokes resistance. Perhaps noting the dangers and futility of this approach, the UN has instead resorted to less formal means of governance, as the use of non-binding soft law mechanisms “initiate[s] a process and a discourse that may involve learning and other changes over time” (Abbott and Snidal, 2001, p. 39). The responsibility to protect (R2P) is one example of this, and by reconceptualising the notion of state sovereignty, R2P did not “elaborate or develop the UN Charter, but it directly contradicted it” (Shaffer and Pollack, 2011). Rather than legally mandating compliance, this approach seeks to persuade, as “governing is performed *through* autonomous subjects not *on* passive objects” (Sending and Neumann, 2010, p. 131). This may seem less effective than governing through material power, but over time, the liquidity of authority can change and destabilise existing conceptions

of institutional legitimacy. Jessop has characterised this as a form of “meta-governance” (2003, p. 109), as the UN governs governance rationalities.

If bottom-up processes of persuasion are to succeed, however, then top-down structures must exist to procedurally legitimate them. In other words, the UN relies upon hegemony, or that the “world regard the existing structure of power and authority as established, natural and legitimate” (Cox, 2010). The UN was conceived during a period of Western supremacy, and if there is a dominant structure of power and authority then “its dominant ideology, now, is liberalism” (Murphy, 2000, p. 792). Of course, the notion of a hegemonic structure may seem rather intangible, but the global ‘liberal’ order is increasingly contested, as “hegemony is a double edged sword” (Simmons, 2009, p. 370). Measuring legitimacy is difficult, and though the UN espouses the idea of a Western, liberal world order, there are other regions and cultures that challenge the validity of this image. This is a distinct problem for the UN, as to be “both of authority and in authority” (Barnett and Duval, 2014, p. 54), the delegating actors must also believe it to be legitimate. Provisions for greater regionalism may seem logical, considering this cultural diversity and the different perceptions of legitimacy. However, we should be careful of the dangers of regional isolation, and ultimately, the goal of UN reform is for the different communities of the world to “gradually interconnect and find their own regional solutions, while raising broader global admiration” (Prado, 2007, p. 11). This will not necessarily occur organically, and history shows that isolation can sometimes stoke the flames of conflict. In light of the dangers and opportunities of regionalism, one may consider Kaul’s proposal for a UN global leadership group, not to enforce or legally mandate behaviour, but rather “to help elaborate and promote” (2011, p. 339) principles of global unity.

As Beck and Grande point out, it is “not just the UN that is in need of reform, but also the nations that support and authorise it” (2004). Human rights violators sitting in the UN Human Rights Council is a tough pill to swallow, but international fora provide great means to socialise actors and begin composing global standards of legitimacy. This may seem overly optimistic, but the great fluidity and flux in world politics is demonstrated by the fact that “state transformation may be the dominant mode through which global governance is constructed today” (Hameiri and Jones, 2016, p. 807). Legitimacy is a matter of balance, and while the current status quo would seem unacceptable for many, the UN must direct processes of legitimisation through epistemic and moral leadership. When it was established in 1945, the UN was positioned as the “anchor for such a hegemonic strategy” (Cox, 1981, p. 137), and though at times it may well have been a lightning rod for criticism, its continued leadership regarding the construction of a global ethic is of utmost importance.

### 3.3. Matrix of Legitimate Governance

Explaining how power and authority can affect the different locations and processes of legitimacy is clearly complex, but its varying solidity and liquidity help explain change and continuity. As a way to conceptualise this complicated relationship, and bring our previous findings together for the benefit of UN reform, Figure 4 offers an illustration of the different forms of governance, their means, procedures; and how they may be legitimised.

**Figure 4. Matrix of Legitimate Governance**

		Process of legitimisation	
		Substantive	Procedural
Forms of Legitimacy	Solid Legitimacy	Compulsory Power	Delegation
	Liquid Legitimacy	Hierarchical	Institutional Power
		Productive Power	Orchestration
		Collaboration	Structural Power

The bifurcations inherent within this matrix are merely an analytical simplification, and they may not always reflect the true reality or complexity of world politics. With this caveat in mind, “legitimacy is not an all or nothing affair” (Beetham, 2013, p. 19), and rather than providing a blueprint for innovation, this matrix should guide future considerations about how the UN may be improved from a number of fronts. However, as the “rationality of governance is dialogic rather than monologic” (Heinelt et al., 2002, p. 46), focusing on one form of governance at the expense of another will yield limited insights, and deciphering the horizontal, vertical and diagonal linkages is important. Legitimacy, as has been stressed, “is a highly fluid concept” (Klabbers and Piiparinen, 2013, p. 30), and while this matrix could bring greater clarity to debates on UN reform, it is merely one clue to a puzzle that may never be solved.

Applying the matrix within a more historical analysis allows us to consider certain assumptions about governance that we often take for granted. For instance, as a thought experiment, the social contract analogy predisposes discussions to viewing the sovereign state as a stalwart in human history, and some even claim “the history of civilisation is a history of public goods” (Wolf, 2012). However, the hierarchical state as we understand it has not

always existed, and only by the 16<sup>th</sup> century did we come to view the “emergence of population as a principle of rule” (Joyce, 2014, p. 753). Prior to this, it was common to believe that “there is no authority except that which god has established” (Adams, 2015, p. 76), and the notion of delegated authority coming from below did not exist. Instead, monarchies and religious empires ruled through clear hierarchy, as the spoken word of god was instrumental in legitimising their power. These ideas are archaic today, but it is useful to understand how they no longer came to be, so that UN reform may advance a similar continuation. The translation of the bible from Latin and the invention of the printing press radically disrupted this previous order, as the solid bases of authority that maintained the hegemonic structures were liquidified. It was only by 1648, that the modern sovereign state was thought to have been born, as the Treaty of Westphalia indicated the dawn of a new age in Europe. Faith in a deity was usurped by faith in rationality, and “with the death of god the state [became] a new idol” (Fitzpatrick, 2014, p. 6). However, in the same way that monotheism was historically confined to certain regions of the world, the unified sovereign state is a product of its time and place, and both were eventually transported overseas through empire. When the UN came along in 1945, its establishment “was pivotal to the epochal change from the era of empires to the era of sovereign states” (Barnett and Finnemore, 2005, p. 167), as the Charter institutionalised a structural belief in the legitimacy of the modern state.

Exercises of this sort are useful, but by no means exhaustive in challenging our assumptions about governance, and though solid forms of legitimacy will prove easier to identify than liquid ones, this does not mean that the latter are not relevant. Instead, the liquid half of our matrix better reflects the undercurrents of change, which are constantly shifting through transforming beliefs and structures. Before the fact, they may not seem relevant, but in retrospect, liquid forms of legitimacy can reinforce or break down solid bases, depending upon their overlap or disengagement. Finnemore suggests that “disconnects between power and authority structures may fuel change” (2014, p. 222), and this matrix may allow us to explore this hypothesis in greater depth. If Baumann and Dingwerth are correct when they claim that world politics is becoming increasingly “hierarchical in terms of power, but heterarchical in terms of the authority that enables or constrains the use of power” (2015, p. 121), then the need for this line of questioning is great. Institutional inertia within the UN is only likely to bolster disillusionment with the current order and intensify the liquidity within world politics, as change seems to be forecast.

## 4. Conclusion

The broad nature of this discussion will have left certain stones unturned, but our expansive scope was partially chosen as a means to energise and reinvigorate a stagnating debate. The matrix of legitimate governance highlights the multi-dimensionality of world politics and our potential for changing it. Traditional forms of governance seem to be faltering, but if we alter our intellectual scope we reveal activity beneath the surface. However, we cannot focus on one of these dynamics of governance at the expense of another, as “if the coming conflict with China is indeed coming, transgovernmentalism will not stop it” (Slaughter, 1997). Historicising questions of UN reform allows us to better understand what type of change we will need for the road ahead. Of course, understanding where we are in history is easier in retrospect, but technology has always proven useful in explaining and indicating change. If the “hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill society with the industrial capitalist” (Lawson, 2007), then we need to begin questioning what the Internet will bring; and how it is relevant for UN reform. Non-state actors have risen to the stage of world politics empowered by technological advances, and it is perhaps no coincidence that “the governance of the Internet represents a microcosm of global governance as a whole” (Movius, 2011, p. 470). The spirit in the machine is thought to be liberalism, but technology is not prophecy, and human ingenuity allows for the ability to reinvent ideas and determine new directions. The crisis in the UN is thought to reflect the idea “that, the old is dying and the new cannot be born” (Gramsci, as cited in Pegram and Acuto, 2015, p. 3), but the growth in technology is but one small indicator of our capacity to reinvent the world around us.

This conceptualisation of the UN as existing in limbo, between heaven and hell, has its dangers, however, and it reflects a type of thinking that could restrict analytical progress. Baumann describes this as our living in a “present which wants to forget the past and no longer seems to believe in the future” (2000, p. 129), as the pessimism surrounding current debates on UN reform seems to reflect. However, one could attribute this to the “tripartite periodization [which has] gripped Western academe like a straightjacket” (Green, 1995, p. 99), and fails to acknowledge the permanence of both change and continuity. Our future task could be to break down the periodisation of history, as advancing technology, knowledge and reflexivity increasingly “marries the present with the future” (Clapton, 2009, p. 22). Thinking in this way allows us to appreciate UN reform in a more holistic sense, and by linking “together past, present and future” (Hartog, 2015, p. 16), we may begin to understand how the next 73 years can be as fruitful as possible for this international institution.

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