

BUILDING PEACE THROUGH THE POLITICAL PROCESSES OF THE UNITED NATIONS

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Abstract

This article explores how peace can be built through the political processes of the United Nations. Drawing extensively on the work of Chadwick Alger, it is argued that the mechanisms and procedures of United Nations decisionmaking contribute to building peace, regardless of whatever decisions are ultimately made. In particular, four dimensions of his research related to the nexus between United Nations processes and peace are discussed: the non-resolution consequences of United Nations decisions, the effects of United Nations participation on delegates and other key actors, the performance of key dynamics which lie at the heart of United Nations decisionmaking, and the innovative research strategies for investigating these and other issues related to building peace through the United Nations.

Introduction

Building peace is a challenging yet necessary enterprise. Writing in the inaugural issue of the *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Galtung reminds us that peace must be understood in expansive terms covering not just the absence of direct violence and war, but also the presence of social structures and cultures that allow all individuals an opportunity to develop to their full potential (1996: 25, 31). Understood in this manner, building peace becomes a multidimensional undertaking requiring a variety of approaches to generate positive social change. In light of this complexity, Chadwick Alger has offered all who work for peace an especially useful conceptualization of how to meet the challenges faced: the “tool chest for peacebuilders” (1996; 1999a). Fourteen of the tools discussed in the introduction of this special issue have their origins in the United Nations or its predecessor the League of Nations: collective security, peaceful settlement, disarmament and arms control, functionalism, self-determination, human rights, peacekeeping, economic development, economic equity, communications equity, ecological balance, governance for the commons, humanitarian intervention, and preventive diplomacy. As a result, it is relatively straightforward to see the connections between the resolutions and policies adopted by the United Nations and strategies for building both a negative and positive peace.

While this nexus between the United Nations and building peace serves as the focus of this article, these particular tools will not be the subject of attention since they will be examined in the contributions which follow. Instead, this article will explore how the political processes of the United Nations, as opposed to the organization’s outputs, contribute to building peace. More specifically, the following pages argue that the mechanisms and procedures of United Nations decisionmaking have an independent and significant impact on the possibility of peace, regardless of whatever decisions are ultimately made. This is true because the processes through which member states interact at the United Nations are ongoing and evolving, spanning many issues that are commonly – and incorrectly – viewed as static and disconnected.

Such a view of the relationship between the United Nations and peace is consistent with the insights offered by key figures in both the peace studies and international organization

literature. For example, Galtung stresses the role of process in building peace when he defines peace as “what we have when creative conflict transformation can take place nonviolently” (1996: 25). Certainly the United Nations is a forum where such transformations can occur since “multilateral organizations affect the broader international system in which they operate even when problems are not resolved within their walls” (Alger, 1961: 129). One mechanism through which this can occur involves Claude’s notion of collective legitimization, where the United Nations acts as a “dispenser of politically significant approval and disapproval of the claims, policies, and actions of states” (1967: 73). However, since the processes through which the organization’s deliberative bodies reach these judgments influence their relative impact on state behavior (93), a further examination of the relationship between United Nations decisionmaking and building peace is required.

Looking more closely at the manner in which the political processes of the United Nations contribute to building peace is fruitful for a second reason; much of the research on international organizations is centered on the nature of the decisions made by these actors and on the subsequent effects of these decisions, but little attention is paid to the decisionmaking process itself. While there are certainly exceptions to this general pattern, scholars have repeatedly identified the need for systematic research into the underlying dynamics of how and why certain decisions result from the internal politics of international organizations. Writing in the late 1960s, Keohane (1967: 221-222), Kay (1969: 958), and Alger (1970: 444) all argued that scholars had neglected the political processes central to the functioning of the United Nations. A similar conclusion was reached by Rochester (1986: 812) and Kratochwil and Ruggie (1986: 754) nearly two decades later when they called for an increased focus on the structure and processes of formal international organizations. Finally, this appeal was repeated across the past decade when Kaufmann (1994: 28), Rochester (1995: 199), Smith (1999: 173), and Alger (2002: 218) observed the continued need for systematic exploration of United Nations decisionmaking. As a result, a better understanding of the nexus between these policy processes and building peace will contribute to both our knowledge about peace and our understanding of how multilateral decisions get made.

While this area of research remains underdeveloped, Alger’s impressive body of scholarship on the United Nations and peace offers important clues and insights that can guide our investigation of this nexus. Throughout the past forty years, Alger has been a faithful student of the role of the United Nations in world affairs and the processes through which different actors participate in its deliberations. Specifically, the following pages will consider four key dimensions of his research that shed light on how the political processes of the United Nations contribute to building peace. First, in a broad sense, Alger has described how intergovernmental contact at the United Nations can facilitate conflict resolution and build peace even when votes are not taken and resolutions are not passed. A second, and related, dimension is Alger’s exploration of how a diverse range of actors, including delegates, secretariat officials, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), participate in United Nations decisionmaking and, in turn, are influenced by this participation. Third, Alger has devoted considerable attention to analyzing the organization’s political processes, especially how the most difficult decisionmaking often occurs through networking and other informal contact between participants. Finally, Alger has offered scholars an important set of research strategies for investigating these and other issues related to the linkages between United Nations decisionmaking and peace. As the discussion of these four dimensions unfolds, particular attention is paid to how Alger’s contributions support, and are supported by, the work of other scholars.

Building Peace Without Decisionmaking

The vast majority of scholarship on the role of the United Nations in world politics focuses on the influence of its resolutions on subsequent state behavior. As a result, thinking about the organization's contribution to building peace frequently centers on examining how United Nations outputs (in the form of resolutions, treaties, programs, and policies) foster either a negative or positive peace. However, some of Alger's earliest research on this organization investigated what he termed the "non-resolution consequences" of United Nations activity, situations where there are no clear outputs from the organization's processes because no votes were taken and no decisions were made. He argues that even in these situations, or one might say especially in these situations, the United Nations can contribute to resolving international conflict and building peace (1961; 1965). It is important to point out that Alger's writing in this area was building on the conventional wisdom previously articulated by diplomatic practitioners and political pundits that "when they're debating they're not shooting" and that "it's useful to keep the communications channels open" (Alger, 1961: 132). However, Alger's contribution involves probing beneath these clichés to examine what types of non-resolution consequences emerge from the United Nations and how they can result in greater success in building peace. Three of his observations in this regard will be considered in this section of the article; the final non-resolution consequence discussed by Alger is addressed in the next section since it directly relates to several other areas of his research.

First, the political processes of the United Nations create an environment where friendships can form between delegates representing different member states, including those from states who have little in common outside of their United Nations membership (Alger, 1961: 133-134). These friendships are facilitated by the physical layout of United Nations headquarters which enables, or even requires, delegates to see each other several times throughout the day and by their interactions in a number of informal settings outside of official meetings including, but not limited to, parties, receptions, the cafeteria, other restaurants, the Delegate's Lounge, the document tables, the coat check, and the restrooms. Alger concludes that, "the sustained interaction of the delegates as well as the variety of the occasions on which they confront each other provides opportunities for the development of friendships across national boundaries that surpass those of normal diplomatic intercourse" (1961: 134). Other scholars and former diplomatic practitioners have similarly found that these personal contacts can have a significant impact on political debate at the United Nations by making it easier for delegates to share ideas, build winning coalitions, and work together across the wide range of issues under discussion. (Peterson, 1986: 211-217; Kaufmann, 1980: 113-117).

Clearly these patterns of friendship are important within the political processes of the United Nations; however, Alger argues that they also have effects outside of the organization which relate to international conflict and peace (1961: 134; 1963b: 420). The networks of contact created by these friendships provide opportunities for more flexible interaction than is possible through formal diplomatic channels, thereby permitting delegates to explore areas of potential agreement or cooperation in the face of official government policies to the contrary. In some cases, governments have instructed their delegates at the United Nations to use these friendships as a vehicle for interacting with unfriendly countries while their bilateral diplomats are being told maintain the status-quo (Alger, 1965: 283; 1968: 110). Short of these rather

extreme cases, daily interaction between friendly delegates can allow for an almost constant exchange of ideas and proposals across different states, thereby sowing the seeds for formal diplomatic initiatives in bilateral settings or in other international organizations where the delegates involved lack these networks of contacts.

A second non-resolution consequence of the United Nations which relates to building peace is that the organization's political processes provide extensive opportunities for the exchange of relevant information (Alger, 1961: 134-137). As can be expected, the near universal membership of the United Nations and the organization's broad agenda result in vast amounts of information being generated before, during, and after its meetings. This includes: proposals advanced by member states, background reports prepared by the secretariat, written comments circulated by interested NGOs, and records kept by each delegate regarding their formal and informal conversations with other participants. Certainly some of this information is available from other sources; however, part of it can only be provided by the unique environment of the United Nations. For example, participation requires member states to be concerned with a number of issues that would not otherwise be on their radar screen if not for the fact that the organization is debating them. Likewise, participation enables them to exchange information with a much wider range of other states, including some that they would overlook if not for their contact at the United Nations.

Finally, the technical nature of many United Nations issues, from disarmament to development, provides delegates and other participants the opportunity to interact with other experts regarding the information being discussed. This can serve to reinforce the formation of friendships as discussed above. Access to these new sources of information certainly contributes to effective decisionmaking at the United Nations, especially in terms of implementation and compliance with agreements that are reached (Jacobson and Weiss, 1995: 126, 142-145). However, even in the absence of specific outcomes to be implemented, access to information can facilitate more effective efforts to build peace outside the organization by providing states with a deeper understanding of the interests and issues facing both potential allies and adversaries (Alger, 1961: 138-139).

A third non-resolution consequence of United Nations processes that can contribute to building peace relates to situations where member states pursue new policy directions without a formal United Nations decision. Such a change can emerge through two interrelated dynamics (Alger, 1961: 135-137; 1965: 277-279). The first involves an expansion of national concern to include issues that the state previously neglected to address because they were not considered directly relevant to their national interests. However, once these issues appear on the organization's agenda, states can feel pressured to advance new policies, even if these only amount to an adoption of a regional or group position. This expansion can necessitate a change in other policy positions that are already held and, as a result, can impact the process of building peace in areas not directly relevant to the new issue on the agenda. The second manner in which new policy directions can emerge involves how multilateral diplomacy at the United Nations promotes shifting coalitions across issues. Certainly key lines of international conflict like East versus West and North versus South have manifested themselves in United Nations debates; however, this should not obscure the fact that participation in the United Nations provides member states with the opportunity to interact with numerous countries with which they have no bilateral relationship. This is especially important for small, developing states when they first join the organization after years of colonialism, but it is also relevant for members with a more

established diplomatic presence when a shift in the patterns of debate results in a new constellation of allies and adversaries.

These processes are intimately relevant to building peace because “new contacts, cooperative activity, and interest groups that cut across older interest groups and regional groupings...tend to inhibit the development of rigid and irreparable cleavages between antagonistic groups of nations” (Alger and Brams, 1967: 656). Furthermore, these authors argue that contacts in the United Nations “constitute only a small fraction of the cross-cutting organizational affiliations of nations” (656) and, when taken as a whole, “organizational ties provide most nations with far greater access to the outside world than do diplomatic ties” (662). Jacobson, Reisinger, and Mathers reach the same conclusion regarding proliferating Intergovernmental Organization (IGO) memberships, finding that states have many reasons to be members of multiple international organizations (1986: 148-152). Furthermore, both studies argue that these memberships can be conducive to conflict prevention. For example, Alger and Brams conclude that “these IGOs offer to small powers in particular...channels for mediating big-power disputes and opportunities for fostering peaceful change” (1967: 662). Likewise, while Jacobson, et al. find “no association between the relative total number of IGO memberships held by a state and its proneness to war,” they do observe that growth in the constellation of IGOs present in world politics contributes to peace by providing states with more opportunities to engage in conflict resolution (1986: 156).

Alger concludes his earliest discussion of these non-resolution consequences of United Nations processes by explicitly linking them to international conflict and peace (1961: 137-142). In doing so he reiterates some points already made, but he also offers two additional points that should be mentioned. First, verbal conflict in the General Assembly and other political bodies may act as a substitute for conflict of “a more violent variety” (142). While such an assertion is very difficult to test empirically, Alger’s research has highlighted how friendships, information, and changes in state behavior can create an environment where discussing an issue at the United Nations prevents the conflict from escalating, even if the ultimate solution to the problem is not a direct result of the organization’s efforts to address it. A second concern raised by Alger in his research on non-resolution consequences is how participation in United Nations processes affects delegates and other actors in a far more elaborate way than just through the formation of friendships discussed above. However, because these effects also relate to other areas of Alger’s research, they will be considered in the following section.

Participation in Decisionmaking

A second dimension of Alger’s research on the political processes of the United Nations and their relationship to building peace centers on how a diverse range of actors who participate in multilateral decisionmaking are influenced in some rather profound ways by their experiences (1961: 132-133). In addition, the participation of these actors impacts the manner in which the processes unfold. In other words, actors are changed by their participation in the process and the process itself is changed by this diverse participation. This reciprocal relationship is found in at least three areas of Alger’s research that will be discussed in the following paragraphs: the experiences of member state delegates (1961; 1963b; 1965; 1968), the role of “nonnational” actors like members of the secretariat (1968), and the changing relationship between the United Nations and NGOs (1994; 1999b; 2003).

When thinking about the relationship between participation in United Nations processes and peace, it is logical to begin with the experiences of delegates since member states are the only actors at the United Nations which have the power to formally participate in decisionmaking through voting on and providing funding for policy proposals. Despite their prominent role, many delegates find themselves immersed in an activity that is unexpected and unsettling when they are posted to the United Nations for the first time. This is a result of the “parliamentary framework of the General Assembly [which] provides an atmosphere that is quite different from that to which most of the delegates are accustomed” given their typical backgrounds in bilateral diplomacy, national politics, and governmental bureaucracies (Alger, 1961: 133). For one thing, the preceding discussion highlighted how participation in the organization’s processes exposes member states, and their delegates, to new sources of information about issues, policies, and other states. This is true because “reading about the foreign policies of many nations, and perhaps even reading United Nations debates, does not have the same impact on the reader as direct participation in the United Nations” (Alger, 1965: 288). In addition, participation in the give and take of building multilateral coalitions requires a different set of skills from bilateral diplomacy. Alger indicates that diplomats at the United Nations must become “mobile delegates” moving seamlessly from one situation to the next (1961: 133), a point which is echoed by Muldoon (1999: 3) and Hamilton and Langhorne (1995: 199-209) when they discuss the importance of flexibility and adaptability as key characteristics of multilateral diplomats.

Given the complexities of United Nations decisionmaking, it is common for scholars to emphasize that it is beneficial for delegates to possess some degree of experience either at the United Nations or in multilateral diplomacy more generally (Cox and Jacobson, 1973: 20). However, it is also true that many member states include personnel without multilateral experience in their delegations, drawing on bilateral diplomats and members of legislatures to fill their ranks (Kaufmann, 1980: 106). In some respects, parliamentarians are well prepared for participation at the United Nations because of their experiences in chaotic decisionmaking situations (Alger, 1963b: 424); however, it is also clear that novice multilateral delegates can be profoundly affected by their experiences, often in positive directions (Riggs, 1977: 523-524). In order to examine the effect of these experiences in a more detailed manner, Alger (1963b) interviewed twenty-five United Nations delegates both before and after their service in the General Assembly during its fourteenth session in 1959. Based on these interviews, he uncovered three important effects on delegate participants that are relevant to the relationship between United Nations decisionmaking and building peace.

The first of these effects is that participation changes the delegates’ notions about how the United Nations actually operates and how it should operate (Alger, 1963b: 414-417; 1968: 124). Most of the comments from the interviews centered on the benefits of the parliamentary nature of United Nations processes including that it gives smaller nations a chance to play an important role, that its resolutions involve a great deal of negotiation and compromise, and that “things which go on in the corridor seem more important” than expected (Alger, 1963b: 416). The underlying theme of these observations is that success at the United Nations requires more than just power in the international system; instead, delegates must effectively participate in the give and take of the political processes if they want to see their preferred policies adopted. In order to do this effectively “requires a merging of the skills normally expected of diplomats and those possessed by successful parliamentarians” (Alger, 1965: 289). This realization is consistent with the writings of Jacobson (1979: 120-124) and Nicholas (1975: 136-137) who

conclude that United Nations delegates must constantly seek to balance their need to represent the interests of their state and, at the same time, work with other members in search of compromise. As a result, participation in the organization's processes acts as a learning experience through which delegates can learn how to better balance these conflicting pressures in search of effective solutions to contentious issues.

A second effect of participation in the United Nations is that delegates may become so immersed in the give and take of decisionmaking that they come to assume what Alger has termed "nonnational" or international roles (1965: 283-285; 1968: 114-117). In these situations, delegates, at least temporarily, put aside the interests of their own state and instead work for the benefit of the international community and the organization itself by helping to secure more effective outcomes. A number of these roles have been identified by Alger, and each one can contribute to building peace. For example, delegates can assume positions of formal leadership in the organization's political bodies. While these positions often lack serious authority, they absolutely must be performed in order to get the decisionmaking process moving and to keep it running smoothly (Kaufmann, 1988: 69-73). In the absence of formal leadership, delegates can also assume roles as intellectual leaders based on, among other things, their expertise, possession of key information, long tenure, salience of the issue to their government, or personal interest. A third role is when delegates act as representatives of a whole group of nations in an effort to facilitate agreement within the group and provide for more effective leverage in negotiations. However, this can also merge into a fourth and final role identified by Alger: when delegates work to foster agreement across groups rather than within them. This function of delegates as brokers is so important for resolving conflict at the United Nations that Kaufmann created a whole vocabulary to refer to their work: "bridge builders" and "fire brigades" (1980: 17-18).

The final effect of United Nations participation on delegates that relates to building peace is that the new skills and knowledge acquired by these individuals can lead to changes in behavior, both within and outside of the organization's processes (Alger, 1963b: 420-423). In the interviews conducted by Alger, delegates seemed to be very conscious of how their initial United Nations experiences would change both their behavior in the organization and their behavior in other diplomatic posts to which they might be stationed later in their career. The source of these changes was that participation caused delegates to rethink their attitudes and perceptions with regard to particular issues and countries (417-420). In other words, participation provided delegates with a new perspective on international events which made it harder to identify the "good guys" and "bad guys" on each issue because the "good guys" sometimes fail to vote with their country just as the "bad guys" on occasion ended up being unexpected sources of support (Alger, 1968: 123). This more nuanced view of international politics contributes to peace by allowing for the possibility of effective problem solving with a much wider range of other member states.

The second set of actors whose participation in United Nations processes enhances the possibility of building peace are members of the secretariat who, like some of the delegates discussed above, perform nonnational roles in decisionmaking (Alger, 1968: 117-121). In this regard, Alger highlights that "members of the secretariat take part in the daily life of an international organization [since] they provide a continuous flow of messages into its society" (118). In particular, these individuals perform three essential functions that can facilitate agreement and contribute to peace: "(a) inform others of past practice and accepted norms of the organization, (b) provide background information through documents and the spoken word, and (c) serve as nonnational monitors of relations among national representatives and of the health of

the organization” (118). This view of the secretariat encompasses many of the political roles identified by other authors (such as Ameri, 1996: 91-149; Luard and Heater, 1994: 102-125; Nicholas, 1975: 168-196); however, it also speaks to a deeper issue regarding the unique responsibilities of the secretariat as “custodians” of the organization (as opposed to simply its “clerks”) given their loyalty to the organization and their long experiences in its processes (Jacob, Atherton, and Wallenstein, 1972: 36). This custodial role can include: serving as the institutional memory of the organization, possessing expertise regarding innovative language that can bridge common areas of disagreement, having the ability to advance proposals and make suggestions national delegates cannot, assisting the chairpersons of United Nations committees to keep them running smoothly, and monitoring the results of United Nations debates such that all members are treated fairly. As can be expected, the secretariat’s efforts in these areas are likely to be “more effective if few know about it” since they work best behind the scenes (Alger, 1968: 118). These dynamics have a twofold contribution to peace: the political processes of the organization are made more effective thereby resulting in better outputs and secretariat officials can utilize their unique role and experiences to inject key insights into debates occurring outside of the United Nations context, including those in the foreign affairs apparatuses of their own states.

The final set of actors whose participation in United Nations decisionmaking has been extensively examined by Alger is representatives of NGOs. As Alger highlights (1994; 1999b; 2003), the relationship between these actors and the United Nations has evolved considerably beyond the consultative arrangements articulated in Article 71 of the Charter. There are numerous reasons why NGOs desire greater contact with the United Nations: many global standards of behavior are drafted through its political bodies, its meetings can provide an important forum for exposing treaty violations and confronting recalcitrant parties, and its role as a center of diplomacy offers NGOs the ability to interact with numerous states and other NGOs in one setting (Ritchie, 1996: 180; Cook, 1996: 181-185). Not surprisingly, there are equally compelling reasons why the United Nations is fostering these contacts as well. For example, Edwards attributes this openness to the organization’s realization that cooperation with NGOs is “good for business” in the sense that “operational partnerships and a broader policy dialogue [with these actors] contribute to more efficient project implementation and a lower rate of failure, a better public image, and more political support” (2000: 208). This is true because “NGOs have been supporters and publicists for the UN, advocates for the UN, critics of the UN, implementers or participants in UN programs; they provide funding, expertise, consultancy and advocacy for equity and justice” (Adams, 1994: 176).

Based on these comments, it is clear that the participation of NGOs in United Nations processes can result in a more effective organization and contribute to peace by making the United Nations more responsive to human needs and by improving the quality of the policies it adopts. As a result, Alger’s recent efforts to provide scholars with a deeper understanding of both the functions performed by NGOs (1994: 309; 1999b: 400) and the mechanisms through which the United Nations and NGOs interact (1994: 306-314; 1999b: 396-399; 2003: 409-420) are especially beneficial to our understanding of how these actors can work together to build peace. While many of these dynamics relate to the activities of the United Nations and NGOs in the field, a number of the insights offered by Alger concern how NGOs participate in the organization’s political processes. From consultative status to liaison offices, from ties to the secretariat to interaction directly with delegates, Alger demonstrates how NGOs are able to draw on their grassroots perspectives, their access to information, their reputation for impartial

monitoring, and their success in advocacy in order to assist the United Nations in its efforts to find more effective solutions to pressing global problems.

The Mechanisms of Decisionmaking

The previous two dimensions of Alger's research on United Nations politics and peace looked at various ways in which the process itself was a tool for building peace. This section turns to Alger's research on the actual mechanisms of United Nations decisionmaking because his work in this area offers important tools for understanding why the organization is more successful at designing strategies to build peace in regards to some issues than it is in regards to others. As a result, fully appreciating the role of the United Nations in building peace requires an exploration of how the organization conducts its decisionmaking such that more or less effective policies are adopted. While Alger examines these dynamics in numerous articles, the following discussion will pay special attention to two of his research projects: a study of the Fifth (Administrative and Budgetary) Committee of the General Assembly during its seventeenth regular session in the fall of 1962 and its fourth special session in the summer of 1963 (found in 1966; 1967; 1972b; 1989) and a comparison of decisionmaking across different bodies of the United Nations system (found in 1972a; 1973). His most important insights from this work concern the role of informal politics at the United Nations, which will be explored first, followed by a consideration of groups, voting, and delegate autonomy.

United Nations observers, especially former participants, have long identified an important role for informal contacts in the organization's political processes. For example, Kaufmann has discussed both the scope of these contacts (from gatherings at the back of meeting halls to the "fine art of corridor sitting," from conversations in the Delegate's Lounge to social functions at member state missions) and the role that they play in decisionmaking by providing participants with the opportunity to plan strategies, exchange ideas, seek out sponsors, and resolve otherwise vague communications (1980: 113-117; 1988: 173-174). In addition, the end of the Cold War resulted in a dramatic increase in the use of these informal consultations at the United Nations (Kostakos, 1995: 66). Despite this importance, the role of informal contacts in United Nations decisionmaking remains under-explored, largely due to the difficulty of systematically capturing the scope and role of these dynamics. However, this is also where one of Alger's most important contributions lies, since he used nine months of intensive observation of the Fifth Committee to address two key issues: what these informal contacts look like and how they interact with the more public aspects of United Nations diplomacy.

From his earliest visits to the United Nations in the late 1950s, Alger was immediately struck by the role of informal contacts, as is reflected in his detailed account of the "intense and exhausting" nature of a day in the life of a United Nations delegate (1961: 131-132) or in his colorful description of the Delegate's Lounge the first time he entered the room (1976: 59). Much of what he observed involved unscripted (and even unspoken) communication between delegates from both allies and adversaries. As part of his interviews during these visits, Alger found that the delegates were keenly aware of how important these informal exchanges are to the process of building agreement (1968: 124). These informal exchanges can be something as simple as discussion between seatmates or a casual conversation in the hall, or they can involve a more complex and purposive effort on the part of one or more delegates to circulate around the perimeter of a meeting or reception looking for specific participants whose input is desired

(Alger, 1966: 147; 1967: 56-59). The number and form of these informal contacts varies across different issues and arenas, and Alger finds several factors that might explain these patterns: the interest of states in resolving an issue, the degree of divergence in national positions on the issue at the start of debate, the past working relationships established between key delegates, and the personal characteristics of participants - including their interpersonal skills, knowledge, and United Nations experience (1967: 63, 82).

For the purposes of this discussion, the most important aspect of these informal contacts concerns their relationship to the more public and formal components of United Nations decisionmaking where votes are taken and decisions are made. This can be thought of as a two-level phenomenon where both public and private exchanges occur simultaneously and are influenced by each other (Alger, 1967: 52; 1972b: 279). On the one hand, committee chairmen understand that public meetings provide important opportunities for informal consultations, and they may endeavor to keep the formal debate going not because they “believe that yet another public speech will help the committee reach consensus, but [because] they do believe that, while the committee is in session, private lines of communication are established and members are encouraged to work on committee problems” (Alger, 1967: 52). On the other hand, the public debate is certainly shaped by these informal conversations because they can act as an important and relatively quick feedback mechanism regarding the ideas that are being discussed (83). Furthermore, Alger observed that the patterns of informal interaction were “remarkably different than the patterns of participation in public debate” (1972b: 279) with countries which were seeking agreement, as opposed to dissenting, being more likely to engage in informal consultations than public speeches (1966: 157). What this suggests is that the two-level nature of United Nations decisionmaking has important implications for resolving conflicts and building peace through its processes since ad hoc procedures are available to those states seeking agreement in situations where the formal mechanisms of debate are deadlocked (158).

While Alger’s thorough investigation of the Fifth Committee stressed the importance of informal contacts, it also uncovered, among other things, significant issues regarding groups, voting, and delegate autonomy in United Nations decisionmaking (see for example 1989: 3). Some of these elements of decisionmaking, such as voting, also receive attention in his comparative analysis of the political processes in the International Labor Organization (ILO), World Health Organization (WHO), World Meteorological Organization (WMO), and the United Nations (1972a; 1973). In terms of groups, research on United Nations decisionmaking has repeatedly highlighted the need to study their role in building and obstructing agreement. Much of this research has focused on geographically based regional groups, which are used mainly for elections for leadership positions in the organization, and common interest groups that may or may not have regional roots (two relatively comprehensive studies for their respective time periods include Hovet, 1960 and Morphet, 2000). In addition, practitioners like Kaufmann (1980: 16; 1988: 72) and scholars such as Peterson (1986: 272) have highlighted the role of negotiating groups comprised of representatives from different common interest groups and focus on trying to build agreement on the most contentious issues under debate.

Alger’s contribution to this research emerged from his systematic examination of the Fifth Committee, where he was able to precisely track the membership of different common interest and negotiating groups during all phases of the committee’s regular session (1967: 70-75; 1972b: 280-285). In addition, his examination of the General Assembly Special Session in 1963 provides an especially detailed account of how these different types of groups – common interest versus negotiating - interacted at each step of the consensus building process (1989).

Because agreement in United Nations committees can contribute to more effective resolutions, group politics play an important role in building peace.

The same is true of other tradeoffs in the mechanisms of United Nations decisionmaking regarding voting and delegate autonomy. On the first of these issues, there is a rich tradition of research that investigates patterns in General Assembly roll call votes (see Holloway, 1990 and Kim and Russett, 1997 for relatively recent studies). However, Alger's research on decisionmaking in the ILO, WHO, WMO, and United Nations found that studying roll call votes only offers a partial picture of the politics involved in creating new programs and activities (1972a: 464) for two reasons. First, roll call votes only represent the end of what can be a very lengthy and heated debate, even in cases where there is little disagreement when the decision is ultimately taken (in other words, this research overlooks the informal politics discussed above). Second, United Nations decisions can be made in any one of a number of ways (Alger discusses five in 1973: 215-224), and that roll call votes are decreasing in their relative use as compared to other options such as consensus (Marin-Bosch, 1987). Alger's findings have important implications for building peace because decisionmaking procedures such as consensus can allow for general agreement to be expressed on controversial issues without requiring extensive debate or formal voting (1973: 217-218).

Finally, Alger's research on the mechanisms of decisionmaking has also uncovered certain factors dealing with delegate autonomy that influence the difficulties delegates face in balancing the need to represent the interests of their state and, at the same time, participate in the give and take of United Nations politics. Conventional wisdom holds that delegates from large states or states particularly interested in the issue receive more detailed instructions than those from smaller or less interested states (Kaufmann, 1980: 111; Kaufmann, 1988: 170; Peterson, 1986: 285). Alger's research supports this conventional wisdom, but also finds that smaller delegations and delegates serving in leadership positions will likely enjoy greater flexibility to build compromises (1967: 55; 1989: 43).

Researching United Nations Decisionmaking

Alger's research has provided scholars with a deeper understanding of how the United Nations conducts its decisionmaking and, furthermore, how the organization's political processes can contribute to conflict resolution and building peace. Alger's findings in these areas are due to his commitment to using innovative, multi-method approaches in his research. From his earliest writing on the United Nations, Alger understood that exploring neglected questions would require the use of research strategies that extended beyond the common use of verbatim records of meetings, the texts of key resolutions, roll call votes, and journalistic accounts (1961: 144). As a result, his efforts to expand the tools available to other international organization scholars are a powerful legacy as it contributes to the work of all those who seek to further explore the nexus between United Nations decisionmaking and building peace, as he does, as well as those who investigate other puzzles which require an understanding of how United Nations processes unfold.

There are three research strategies used by Alger throughout his career which are particularly helpful for understanding issues related to the themes of this article. First, Alger has continually looked to areas of scholarship developed outside of the dominant American theories of international relations in search of analytical concepts that can provide leverage in

understanding the United Nations system. Examples of this can be found in nearly every article discussed thus far, including his linkage between the non-national roles of delegates and the research on multiple identities (1968: 125), his use of writings on socialization in developing countries to discuss how the United Nations community evolved as new members joined (1963a: 409-414), and his effort to engage international scholarship in his discussion of the role of NGOs and civil society at the United Nations (1999b).

A second research strategy found across Alger's work on the United Nations is his use of a wide range of data in order to investigate the research questions he finds most compelling. When he first arrived at the United Nations to research the conflict management activities of the organization in the Middle East and Kashmir, he immediately realized that much of the political debate was unfolding in a manner that defied simple understanding given the research strategies which dominated the study of international organizations at the time (1976: 16). As a result, Alger combined traditional documentary and statistical approaches to data analysis with two innovative strategies new to the study of international organizations: observation of interaction patterns and interviews with delegates. As Alger readily admits, both of these methods involve some limitations in that observation does not uncover the content of what is said (1970: 437) and interviews can be compromised by subjects who either intentionally or inadvertently misrepresent how events unfolded (1976: 62). However, despite these limitations, these methods allow scholars to explore important questions about the political processes of the United Nations and the findings generated by these efforts can certainly be compared to data from more traditional sources in an effort to avoid any problems of accuracy.

The final research strategy pursued by Alger that has facilitated a deeper understanding of United Nations processes concerns his efforts to draw on the writings of diplomatic practitioners in search of helpful concepts and insights. Alger has observed that "both scholars and practitioners realize how essential it is to clearly separate the two professions," but "it is [also] necessary that there be a dialogue between the two, so that scholars benefit from the insights attained through practice and practitioners are able to apply relevant research" (2002: 209). Alger's research helps to build these bridges. This is reflected by his relationship with one practitioner turned scholar cited extensively in this article, Johan Kaufmann, a former permanent representative from the Netherlands to the United Nations (see in particular Alger, 2002). In addition to Kaufmann, Alger has frequently made use of reform proposals advanced by current and former secretariat officials, including Brian Urquhart and Erskine Childers (see for example Alger, 1999b; 2003). This effort to foster a marriage between theory and practice has important implications for our understanding about United Nations decisionmaking and how the organization's processes can contribute to building peace.

Conclusion

This article began with the observation that the political processes of the United Nations can act as an instrument for building peace even in situations where no outputs are generated. Scholarly efforts to explore how these dynamics unfold have been significantly influenced by the work of Chadwick Alger. His research interests in United Nations decisionmaking and building peace have cross-fertilized each other in a manner that has enhanced our understanding of both of these fields and, more importantly, areas where they intersect. Alger's innovative, multi-method strategies for researching the United Nations have enabled him to illustrate how the

organization's political processes contribute to building peace through their non-resolution consequences, through the effects of participation on delegates and other key actors, and through the enhanced performance of the mechanisms which lie at the heart of the decision process.

Fortunately for the rest of us, Alger and the other authors surveyed in this article leave some issues related to this nexus under-explored. One example concerns the continued need, highlighted above, to systematically explore United Nations decisionmaking. Important progress has been made in this regard, but the best scholarship in this area is largely based on research that was conducted more than two decades ago. This neglect across the 1980s and beyond occurred when the study of international organizations was eclipsed by regime theory, an approach to understanding patterns of international cooperation which remained state-centric in its focus (Haggard and Simmons, 1987: 499). Unfortunately, the years of regime theory dominance also represent a period of time during which the United Nations became a very different place than it was when this earlier research was completed; two important changes already highlighted above concern the increased importance of decisionmaking by consensus (Marin-Bosch, 1987) and the growing use of informal consultations in its processes (Kostakos, 1995: 66). The insights offered by Alger and other authors can still serve as a useful springboard for new research, but current scholarship must be cognizant of the fact that some modifications and refinements in their ideas will be required to accurately reflect the changing nature of United Nations decisionmaking.

A second issue related to United Nations decisionmaking and peace that requires additional attention concerns "the relationship between the nature of the negotiation processes and outcomes" (Alger, 2002: 215), including implementation and compliance. While there is a growing literature on compliance with international organizations, some of which was cited above, these studies tend to focus on the interests of states and the content of the agreement, not on the processes through which the agreement was created. Since state compliance with treaties is an integral part of building peace, both international organization and peace studies scholars will benefit from a deeper understanding of how different United Nations processes can either facilitate or inhibit the implementation of these agreements. Alger's research on the United Nations and its mechanisms of decisionmaking lays the groundwork for exploring these issues, but further research is certainly required.

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