In *The United Nations as Leviathan: Global Governance in the Post-American World*, Roland Rich presents a wide-ranging and bold account of how current “systemic timidity” (238) in the United Nations (UN) could be addressed in order to tackle humanity’s greatest threats. Eschewing technical jargon, Rich writes an accessible and thoughtful account, supported by insightful examples and anecdotes from his own experiences. He argues that the current “haphazard” nature of occasional international cooperation, “muddling along” with begrudging but increasingly less relevant United States leadership, can no longer be sustained (1). In the age of the Anthropocene, which occasions more rapid changes, he claims that “global cooperation through global governance is within our reach” (1). Throughout *The United Nations as Leviathan*, Rich liberally cites a wide range of sources to inform his thesis, not only drawing on the UN, its Charter and Resolutions as well as international case law, but also his own wide-ranging experience, national constitutions, procedural rules, indigenous practices, scholarly works, and research think tanks. He presumes that once ideas take hold, even if they are not palatable to governments, the momentum will lead to action in a “continuation of the arc of history” (113). His vision extends into all reaches of the UN and is not designed to fall into the traps of piecemeal reform efforts, which can be stymied at each step; rather, he envisions nothing less than a reborn UN.

Rich is clear that he neither envisages nor advocates for a world government. The core philosophy underpinning his work is grounded in a benign version of the Hobbesian Leviathan, a form of sovereign political authority that is legitimated based on a social contract with its subjects. In a post-Westphalian/Weberian world, where *Pax Americana* is no longer a guarantee and other potential contenders offer no acceptable alternative, the book offers the vision of a UN that has been freed from systemic, and systematically misused, bureaucracy and nationalistic constraints. Rich acknowledges that his work will attract criticism (21) but also challenges that not making the effort to reimagine a better UN is defeatist. He is also...
pragmatic, recognizing that building a new organization is a non-starter. Rather, he looks to build on existing foundations, dedicating new efforts to advancing global governance based on true cooperation and independent funding.5

Thomas Hobbes’s Leviathan serves as both an inspiration and a warning. The re-imagined “UN 3.0” is based on a universally accepted “social contract on a global scale” (6-7). A new UN would need to rise above nationalism, focusing its moral prowess on “the business in which it has strengths—the ratification, espousal, and defense of norms” to “achieve restorative governance” (16).

In a period of unprecedented change, exacerbated by the “absence of effective cooperation in dealing with existential threats,” Rich argues for a governing influence that softens these impacts and equalizes outcomes (17). He is optimistic that the current haphazard international cooperation can morph into true global governance but posits that effective responses require flexibility and imagination (17). While The United Nations as Leviathan sits as part of the rich literature that examines the UN critically in its historical context and relevance as well as in its ongoing reform projects, rather than despairing at the stagnant nature of efforts, Rich is an optimist who wants the UN to succeed. He certainly offers a new and important forward-looking vision of a reimagined, radically different UN.

One might ask what is wrong with the UN as it is? And the answer might be, a lot. Rich praises UN achievements, and the hard work of its agencies in alleviating terror and threats as well as addressing basic human needs. But these are the invisible actions that do not attract much attention. He focuses on the visible actors, and in that regard, he declares the General Assembly as “not fit for purpose” (37); the Security Council (SC) as beholden to the whims of its permanent members—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, also known as the Permanent Five, Big Five, or P5; and the Secretariat, which carries out the day-to-day operations of the UN, with its often-compromised Secretary-General, as lacking teeth and being mired in institutionalized lethargy. Rich examines in detail a UN bureaucracy which has become “comfortable with mediocrity” (59) and is beset with an appointment process that has inverted the intentions of Article 101(3) of the UN Charter.6 This is further complicated by Secretariat members

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6 This is more fully explored in Chapter 12: A Vision, Not a Roadmap.


8 “The paramount consideration in the employment of the staff and in the determination of the conditions of service shall be the necessity of securing the highest standards of efficiency, competence, and integrity. Due regard shall be paid to the importance of recruiting the staff on as wide a geographical basis as possible.” “United Nations Charter, Article 101(3),” United Nations, https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/full-text.
tending to serve national interests rather than heeding the UN Charter. He makes the simple argument that the Articles should be applied according to their original meanings to regain legitimacy.

Drawing on terminology to group the UN “universe” into a UN of member states, of secretariats, and of non-state actors, respectively, Rich proceeds to pick them apart before outlining their respective potential contributions to a reimagined UN.

He advocates the complete overhaul of existing organs, starting with the General Assembly (GA), proposing it to be split into more focused and dedicated Assemblies to “tackle issues on the global agenda” (49), each with its own portfolio and composition yet interdependent. While he does go into the details of how and why, as occurs quite often in the book, the details are vague. An argument for a dissection of the UN into dedicated portfolios is tenable, but it is questionable whether separate and dedicated Assemblies would deliver effective results, considering that their composite numbers are proposed to be equivalent to the current GA and are meant to work cooperatively.

As for reforming the Security Council, Rich argues that its current format does not need radical change but, rather, better working practices and limitations on veto use and scope, all of which would have to be made palatable to its current holders (251). His answer points to a concert-of-power arrangement (82), aligning this with his vision of an independent Secretary-General in accordance with Article 99 (86-87), and tying his argument into the technically defunct but full of potential Article 43. He envisions the Secretary-General as becoming a truly independent actor, one who is free from external influences and threats, and speaks truly on behalf of “we the peoples.” In order to achieve the ideal UN bureaucrat, Rich repeatedly comes back to the idea and the importance of “competent staff” (10).

What is the purpose of the Leviathan? The UN has become the repository for expectations, aspirations, and visions; a global moral authority which can only be maintained if “subsidiarity, certification, and legitimacy” (168) are embedded. There are consequently a lot of boxes to tick. Rich deals with the most pressing issues, those affecting humanity as a whole.

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11 “The Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.” “United Nations Charter, Article 99,” United Nations.

12 “1. All Members of the United Nations, in order to contribute to the maintenance of international peace and security, undertake to make available to the Security Council, on its call and in accordance with a special agreement or agreements, armed forces, assistance, and facilities, including rights of passage, necessary for the purpose of maintaining international peace and security. 2. Such agreement or agreements shall govern the numbers and types of forces, their degree of readiness and general location, and the nature of the facilities and assistance to be provided. 3. The agreement or agreements shall be negotiated as soon as possible on the initiative of the Security Council. They shall be concluded between the Security Council and Members or between the Security Council and groups of Members and shall be subject to ratification by the signatory states in accordance with their respective constitutional processes.” “United Nations Charter, Article 43,” United Nations.
Peace is at the heart of the Leviathan, facilitated and ensured through the promotion of development\textsuperscript{13} and backed up by a framework of enforcement in case of violations. Under Article 24(1), this assurance was primarily assigned to, and remains with, the SC. While flawed and ineffectual at times, Rich posits that it is unknown what the world would look like without it (74) and therefore does not propose to reform the SC. He instead offers an alternative vision to its members, and the permanent seat holders in particular, that concentrates on the spoilers to peace efforts.

Peace, however, is more than the absence of conflict. To realize the development aspiration,\textsuperscript{14} he relies heavily on the theoretical but nonetheless universally accepted human rights canon (95-96) while instrumentalizing democratic values (97). While clearly a supporter of the UN’s development agenda, Rich is scathing about Sustainable Development Goals—he provocatively entitles Chapter 7, “Against the Sustainable Development Goals”—highlighting the fallacies in the development narrative and arguing, instead, in favor of “restorative governance” (125-128), by placing more emphasis on providing relief through key sources of wealth. The UN itself would be the public forum platform and moral authority, leaving logistics and delivery to those who can do so, thereby making better use of the forces of globalization.

Indeed, rather than allowing “super charged capitalism on a global scale” (164) to go unchecked, Rich highlights that the UN already unites numerous bodies and agencies that oversee and regulate the globalization discourse (143-174). He charts the successes but also identifies issues with initiatives that are principally sound but fight for survival beyond initial fanfare. His UN would positively and proactively govern the accelerating globalization processes but leave the details to those who can deliver, \textit{inter alia}, hardware, logistics, and expertise, a theme to which he returns in his discussion of global pandemics (214-236). When a global response to Covid-19 was needed, governments reverted to reflexive introspection and “Hobbesian behaviour” (226) while the World Health Organization (WHO) was not in a position to act as the “first responder” (216). Does it make sense to submit global crises like pandemics to market force principles, but have these crises checked, measured, and overseen by the UN? As part of the wider “UN planetary system,”\textsuperscript{15} Rich’s third UN draws on “knowledge networks or epistemic communities” that can be both formal and informal (31).\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, the argument that drawing on a wide range of external expertise to find solutions to problems is well made and supports the proposition that, if managed properly, independence and expertise create sources of knowledge while the UN offers the overarching “normative canon” (33).

Humanity is faced with an even bigger challenge: climate change (117-142). While environmental causes can be successfully navigated—Rich uses the Montreal Protocol of 1987 (175-177)—he also concedes that it is easier to fight one cause than to comprehend, agree on, and fight a number of intricately connected causes, especially when a myriad of interests, both political and economic, are at stake. Rich considers a multifaceted approach, from the Green New Deal idea that links climate change as part of a polycentric approach (181) under the auspices of the UN in partnership with expert bodies well versed in data collection, “naming and shaming” (182) to proposals that make climate change denial a crime against humanity (183).

Increasingly linked to this is the growing global refugee crisis (193-212). Rich asks the pertinent question of how the world will deal with the future of refugees when current flows are poorly received and managed, resources are severely constrained, and the global discourse is toxic. Rich makes the point that the current era,

\begin{footnotesize}
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  \item Development in the wide sense of economic development and human rights assurance. This builds on
  \item See Mahbub ul Haq, “Human Development in a Changing World,” United Nations Development
  \item The analogy of a planetary system is drawn from Dieter Göthel, \textit{Die Vereinten Nationen: Eine Innenansicht}
  (Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt, 2002).
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new threats like climate change add to the terminological complexity of classifying who is a refugee. Consequently, he revisits the classification criteria and advances the development of a newly devised risk management strategy that is applied to groups of people (207-208).

Rich posits that the key to unlocking human rights, democratic values, and development is for the UN 3.0 to tame both “sovereignty” (107) as well as the unchained, and potentially destructive, powers of globalization. Rich is not anti-government but would like to see a check on pure sovereignty (254) through the principle of subsidiarity (257). Rich commends achievements in achieving global justice across several bodies but wants to go further, linking all civil and criminal instances into a coherent structure (111). His vision for fostering democracy manifests the UN as an independent and unbiased arbiter but with a legal bite (112). While Rich does not suggest that the UN become a world government, he argues that the “veil of sovereignty” must occasionally be pierced (108) even at the risk that the benign Leviathan may then be seen as overbearing.

The strengths of this book are based upon the author’s unshakeable belief in the UN as a potential force for good. Rich’s personal experiences have shaped his conclusion that piecemeal reforms are not the solution and that bold action is required. The weakness in the narrative is linked to the proposition that “we the peoples” will be supportive of his proposals. Indeed, he presumes grassroot approval a corollary to his ideas’ persuasive force. In a way, the re-envisioned UN will still be elitist and overbearing as the administration and management will remain in the hands of a few although that is one of Rich’s key counterarguments. He advocates the placing of more authority and autonomy in the hands of those who are subject to the outcomes of initiatives, programs, and rules. The book covers a wide range of areas to govern, and while Rich includes a chapter on the threats caused by borderless viral world, this focus is entirely on health. It curious that no attention is paid to the future of technology—cyber security in all its forms—even if the foundations for this are implied in the main framework vision.

Rich’s narrative does not deal with the details. Its vision is that of what rather than how. This is the key strength, as this vision remains uncluttered by administrative details. It is simultaneously a weakness because although Rich hints at how current systems can be repurposed to achieve the overarching vision, there is no detailed plan on how to implement his vision. All in all, humanity’s future requires a fresh look at how the world can be governed and Rich certainly offers an optimistic vision in *The United Nations as Leviathan*.

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