

Book Review: United Nations Protection of Humanity and its Habitat: A New International Law of Security and Protection by Bertrand G. Ramcharan

Samuel B. Hoff
Delaware State University

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Ramcharan, Bertrand G. United Nations Protection of Humanity and its Habitat: A New International Law of Security and Protection. Leiden; Boston: Brill Nijhoff, 2016. xxi + 278 pages. Hardcover, \$229.00.

This work was inspired by the seventieth anniversary of the United Nations in 2015. Author Bertrand Ramcharan's background includes both academic and practical experience. In the academic field, he has been a professor at several institutions and Chancellor of the University of Guyana, his native country. Associated with the United Nations itself, he has previously served as head of the speechwriting for the UN Secretary General, director of one of the divisions of the UN Department of Public Affairs, and member or director of several UN commissions on human rights, among other posts. The overarching theme of the book is that despite the UN's challenges, its protection role is consistent with the founding spirit of the organization and will help define its future effectiveness as a world body.

In the Introduction, Ramcharan evaluates the UN's current practice of protection in a dozen areas, finding that although some, such as humanitarian actions, have been quite successful, others, like peacekeeping operations, have not. The subsequent twelve chapters proceed to explain performance in these areas and to recommend strategies for improvement moving forward. There is no specific division to the text, but one can find patterns in the coverage of the areas provided.

Several chapters deal with the alignment and operation of the UN and how these features contribute to its protection function. Chapter 1 highlights UN structure and approaches to protecting the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in societies, including children, women, the poor, the disabled, and those suffering from disease. Chapter 2 examines legal and judicial standards for protection. In Chapter 3, the author presents a series of UN resolutions which have responded to various threats and challenges. Chapter 4 delineates the roles of the UN Secretary General and of the Security Council in protection of humanity and habitat and identifies a series of measures, such as intercessions, fact-finding, and stand-by arrangements. Chapter 12 contains a separate analysis of the roles of the Security Council.

Chapters 5 through 7 demonstrate the UN's protection role in preserving the Earth and its surroundings. Chapter 5 reviews key UN initiatives for protecting the environment over the last half-century, especially those programs, conferences, and commissions which have transpired over that duration. Chapter 6 details the UN's record of protecting the world's oceans and polar regions. Chapter 7 deals with UN General Assembly resolutions addressing protection of outer space. The author identifies human-made space debris and its potential for damaging both the Earth and other worlds as among the future concerns pertaining to this area.

The common component found in Chapters 8 through 11 is a response to violence. Chapter 8 highlights how the UN has sought to regulate and limit weapons of mass destruction through treaties, commissions, and conferences, of which the most noteworthy is the Nuclear

Non-Proliferation Treaty. Chapter 9 traces a series of General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and international sanctions designed to protect against terrorism and violent extremism. Chapter 10 reviews the record of UN offices created to stem armed conflicts. Finally, Chapter 11 probes reasons for human rights violations together with national and international mechanisms for limiting them. In Ramcharan's view, the "credibility of the United Nations will depend on what it can do to better protect human rights world-wide. This is a formidable and pressing challenge" (p. 248).

In the book's Conclusion, Ramcharan outlines several recommendations intended to serve as a foundation for global protection in the future. He favors strengthening international law pertaining to security. Once that is done, he contends that the Security Council needs to be more assertive in utilizing those precepts. Further, he wants to keep a constant focus on protection mechanisms by mandating publication of periodic global protection reports. Finally, he supports preventative actions by being aware of emerging threats.

Although Ramcharan cites his own research only twice in the book's bibliography, he has written nearly thirty books on UN and human rights topics. Joan Fitzpatrick, author of a 2006 book on how the international system struggles to protect human rights during crises, and coauthors Jack Donnelly and Daniel Whelan, whose 2017 study examines ways in which nations and international entities have addressed human rights since World War II, have joined him over the last decade.

Among the many positive qualities of Ramcharan research is the comprehensiveness of his survey in which he relies on original documents and his own experience to explain contemporary structure, functions, and performance of the UN and its parts. This gives confidence to the reader that his suggestions for improvement are not pipe-dreams but feasible ideas.

There are some shortcomings here. The uneven length of chapters and inconsistent sequential presentation of material is bothersome though expected in such a broad overview of the UN's protection role. Further, while most of his priorities for increasing the UN's effectiveness are located at the end of each chapter, the section on the Security Council (Chapter 12) contains advocacy points throughout. Probably the most glaring omission in his study is the lack of attention given to how nations and their leaders can disrupt or alter UN protection strategies through non-violent means, such as corruption or willful rejection of pending international agreements.

Still, Ramcharan's obvious commitment to the ideals and goals of the United Nations leaves the reader with optimism for the future. His point that the UN's "greatest asset is its moral authority grounded in world public opinion" is an accurate observation of the organization's greatest strength in the domain of protection and overall (p. 46).

Donnelly, Jack, and Daniel Whelan, 2017. *International Human Rights*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Fitzpatrick, Joan, 2006. *Human Rights in Crisis: The International System for Protecting Human Rights During States of Emergency*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Samuel B. Hoff, Ph.D.
George Washington Distinguished Professor of History and Political Science
Delaware State University
Dover, Delaware