

**Righter, Rosemary. Utopia Lost: The United Nations and World Order . New York: The Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1995.**

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Volume 16, Number 1, Spring 1996

URI: [https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs16\\_01br03](https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/jcs16_01br03)

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**Publisher(s)**

The University of New Brunswick

**ISSN**

1198-8614 (print)

1715-5673 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

**Cite this review**

Huebert, R. (1996). Review of [Righter, Rosemary. Utopia Lost: The United Nations and World Order . New York: The Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1995.] *Journal of Conflict Studies*, 16(1), 171–172.

**Righter, Rosemary. *Utopia Lost: The United Nations and World Order* . New York: The Twentieth Century Fund Press, 1995.**

Rosemary Righter has written an extensive and wide ranging critique of the United Nations. Her documentation and research is extensive and vast. Yet in spite of this, she has ultimately written a 400 page polemic that only attempts to show how the UN could be saved if only the world would hand the organization to the US (and possibly the UK). Her assessments are one-sided and completely biased in favor of the American position. Thus, this book does not have very much to contribute to our understanding of the problems facing the United Nations.

There is no doubt that the United Nations now faces several important challenges. Furthermore, in many instances, the UN has failed miserably in its efforts to address these problems. But in order to fully understand these problems, it is necessary to address all sources of the problem, not only one dimension as is the case in this book.

Righter's position essentially is that if everyone was to listen to the US and Britain then all of the world's problems would be solved. While she is quite accurate in her critiques of the bureaucratic problems created by the UN, there is never a mention of the problems caused by the US. There is no mention of the fact that because of the US refusal to pay its dues important actions, such as those being conducted by WHO and UNICEF, have to be cut back. When she offers her pronouncement on the possible "cures" for the problems facing the UN she lists four (opting out, structural reform, facade management and selective action all of which are explained in chapter 9). She does not consider, let alone mention, the option of the member states taking their commitments seriously and, in particular, providing the UN with the resources that it requires. The inclusion of such an option would, however, suggest that the Americans may be responsible for some of the problems faced by the UN, and this is an option that she simply refuses to consider.

Most of Righter's critiques of the UN do not fully examine the problem she is reviewing within the UN. For example, she continually attacks the issue of sovereign equality. The book is rife with comments such as, "why should anyone care about the position of Fiji on Palestine?" She sees nothing to be gained by allowing all member states to have a voice at the UN. Her position is that only the states that "count" should really be allowed to participate. However, she is vague on the criteria that determines who counts. One suspects that Righter would be no more willing to support a UN system of voting that was based on total population rather than on individual state sovereignty. This would mean that India would be able to dominate the agenda of the UN. And since India is a functioning democracy, on what basis could this be criticized? Yet it is doubtful that she would see this as an improvement, particularly if India outvoted the US on a consistent basis. The only UN organizations that she does speak favorably about are the IMF and the World Bank. Not surprisingly, voting in these organizations is predicated on the economic strength of the member states, and not on democratic ideals.

Righter also refuses to even note that several of the most important UN initiatives were the result of proposals put forward by the so-called microstates. For example, the UN

Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) resulted from a proposal put forward by Arvid Pardo, a member of the delegation from Malta. UNCLOS has been the only global agreement that has provided an international basis governing the usage of the oceans. While it is not a perfect agreement, it is chilling to think what state the oceans would now be in without the development of the Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), or any of the other safeguards and rules formulated by the convention.

Righter's American focus is so overpowering that she simply refuses to acknowledge the positive roles played by any other state outside of Great Britain. Any Canadian students of the United Nations will be unable to find any reference to Canadian involvement in the UN. As far as she is concerned, the UN was a direct invention of the US and UK. This of course would be news to any person who has read the biographies of Lester Pearson and John Holmes, or the studies on Canadian involvement in the birth of the UN by James Eayrs. Furthermore, according to Righter, the development of peacekeeping was strictly the result of action undertaken by the secretary-general, once again news to most Canadians.

The only positive point that can be made about the book is that she provides a full explanation of the American position regarding the UN under Ronald Reagan. Chapter 8, "The Challenge From Washington," outlines the position and actions taken by Reagan in his efforts to distance the US from the UN. This chapter is written from a strong ideological position, but still she has done a good job of documenting the American position.

This one positive attribute aside, this reviewer cannot recommend this book. Most of her arguments can be better understood in the more succinct writings by groups such as the Heritage Foundation. The foundation has continually taken positions that were accepted by the Republicans when they held the US presidency. Thus, much of what Righter writes echoes their position, but they do not need 400 pages to make their case.

There are significant problems with the UN. And Righter is correct in some instances. But her refusal to even consider that the US shares some of the blame ultimately discredits her entire analysis. Thus, this reviewer suggests that the reader interested in understanding the UN, and in particular the problems that it faces, should look elsewhere for that information.

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